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Empty-handed

THE ISRAELI cabinet failed yesterday to reach agreement on a proposal for a West Bank troop pullback, sending Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu empty-handed into a crucial meeting with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Foreign Minister David Levy, who had demanded that Netanyahu have a detailed withdrawal plan ready for Albright, said he would not accompany the prime minister to Thursday's meeting with the secretary of state in Paris, as initially planned.

"The [Netanyahu-Albright] meeting won't have all the necessary details. Therefore, the results may not be good," Levy told Israel Radio after the three-hour cabinet session, the third in four days.

A cabinet statement said Netanyahu would discuss with Albright, apparently in general terms and without maps, which areas of the West Bank Israel is interested in keeping.

"He [Netanyahu] stressed to the ministers that we consider Jewish settlements to be of national importance," the statement said. "We will safeguard all the settlements, the surrounding areas and the roads leading to them."

The cabinet has been discussing rival proposals this week as to where the final borders with the Palestinians should run.

Clinton sign

US PRESIDENT Bill Clinton made fresh overtures toward Iran offering an honest dialogue without asking Tehran to drop its opposition to the peace process in the Middle East. In a marathon news conference on Tuesday that touched on everything from Iraq to race relations and his new dog, Clinton defended the US policy of isolating Iran but said Washington was discussing with allies how to proceed after being encouraged by recent conciliatory remarks by Iranian leader President Mohammad Khatami, Reuters reported.

In a major concession Clinton said the US would not ask Iran or any other Islamic country to change their attitude toward the Middle East peace process, but would still ask every country to give up the support, training, and financing of terrorism.

Regarding relations with Israel, Clinton denied he had snubbed Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu by not meeting him during his visit to the US last month. He said he expected to meet Netanyahu early next year provided there were signs that the meeting would lead to progress in the peace process. (see p.4)

Jewel stop

AFRICAN-American Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan arrived in Cairo yesterday for a visit to a city he described as the "jewel of the Arab world" and said the next stop on his "world friendship tour" would be Libya.

"I am honoured to be in the jewel of the Arab world, Cairo, Egypt," the leader of the Chicago-based Nation of Islam told reporters. "Egypt is a critical nation in the peace process" and "in the unification of the Arab and Muslim world."

The 64-year-old Farrakhan said he planned to meet the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, during his three-day visit to Egypt, and "hopefully" some political leaders as well.

Farrakhan has described his three-month tour of more than 50 countries as a "mission of peace and reconciliation."

On common ground

Iranian President Khatami, speaking exclusively to Dina Ezzat in Tehran, insists he will improve relations with the world community, save one

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami maintains that his country can have good relations with the entire world — excluding Israel — without compromising any of its Islamic hallmarks and policies. "In its relations with Islamic and non-Islamic states, the Islamic Republic of Iran is always seeking relations that are based on mutual respect," he said.

"As Muslim countries, we need to consider the common ground, the principles that tie us together as one nation...We need to look into the future and see how these common interests and values can open up horizons for cooperation amongst ourselves despite the differences and problems that have been marring our relations," Khatami said.

Khatami spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* at the conclusion of last week's summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), hosted by Iran, which used the event to emerge from almost two decades of political isolation.

Iran's new status on the international stage was made possible by Khatami's rise to power. He is generally viewed, both at home and abroad, as projecting Iran's new, friendly face. At home he is perceived as learned and pious, the dedicated and spiritual son of Imam Ayatollah Khomeini. But he is also viewed as the liberal face of the Iranian revolution which, for the past two decades, has been suspected by many in the international community of exporting terrorism. And for Iranian women, to whom Khatami has promised greater rights, he is viewed as the "light at the end of the tunnel." Analysts, though, fear Khatami's room for manoeuvre is severely restricted by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the ultra-conservative spiritual leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Khatami told the *Weekly* that he is confident that there is always a way to solve inter-Islamic problems and that his country is prepared to take that road: "When you ask me about the role the Islamic Republic would like to play in the region and the Islamic world, I say that we would like to affirm the principles of fraternity, the need for partnership, the value of understanding... and of working together towards the development and progress of the Islamic world."

The Iranian president firmly believes that "for each country to stick to its policies" does not mean that they cannot work together towards common objectives. "Look at the OIC, for example, where we had Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen, speaking the same language when it came to Islamic dignity and independence, although they are very different countries," Khatami argued.

With this in mind, Iran's president affirmed that "there is no reason that two leading countries like Iran and Egypt, whose civilisations have contributed so much to the Islamic world, and who are two pillars of the region, should not solve their problems; there is no reason for this."

Khatami also believes that the quarrel between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over the islands of Abu Moussa and Greater and Lesser Tunb can be successfully resolved through dialogue.

And unlike many of the leading figures of the theocratic regime, Khatami, who studied theology and has a doctorate in philosophy, is convinced that there is room for a dialogue between Islamic and Western cultures.

"We Muslims must look at our past not with the intention of confining ourselves to that past but with the objective of learning from its positive points, points on which we can build our future. The re-creation of a replica of the old civilisation is neither possible, for its time is long gone, nor desirable, even if it were possible."

To move with the times, the Muslim world, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, should not, Khatami insists, fear Western culture.

"Residing in a common Islamic home does not mean regression, rejection of scientific achievements, withdrawal from the modern world or seeking conflict with others," he said.

Even with the United States, dubbed the "Great Satan" by post-revolution Iran, Khatami believes "there could be a dialogue whereby we do not relinquish our Islamic principles and policies" but get to benefit from Western technology.

At a news conference in Tehran last Sunday, Khatami became the first post-revolution Iranian leader to speak publicly of the possibility of dialogue with Washington. "I take this opportunity to pay my respects to the great American people and hope to have a dialogue with the American people and the United States in the not too distant future," he said.

It is through dialogue within the Islamic world and between Islamic and Western cultures, Khatami believes, that many of "the world's problems can be solved and peace can be achieved... particularly in Palestine."

Characterising Israel as "hegemonic, racist and aggressive," Khatami insisted that it represents the real "threat to peace and stability in the region."

"History shows that no peace can last without justice. It is clear that peace can be established only through the realisation of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the inalienable right of self-determination, return of refugees and liberation of all the occupied territories, particularly *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* [Holy Jerusalem]," he said. (see pp.2&4)

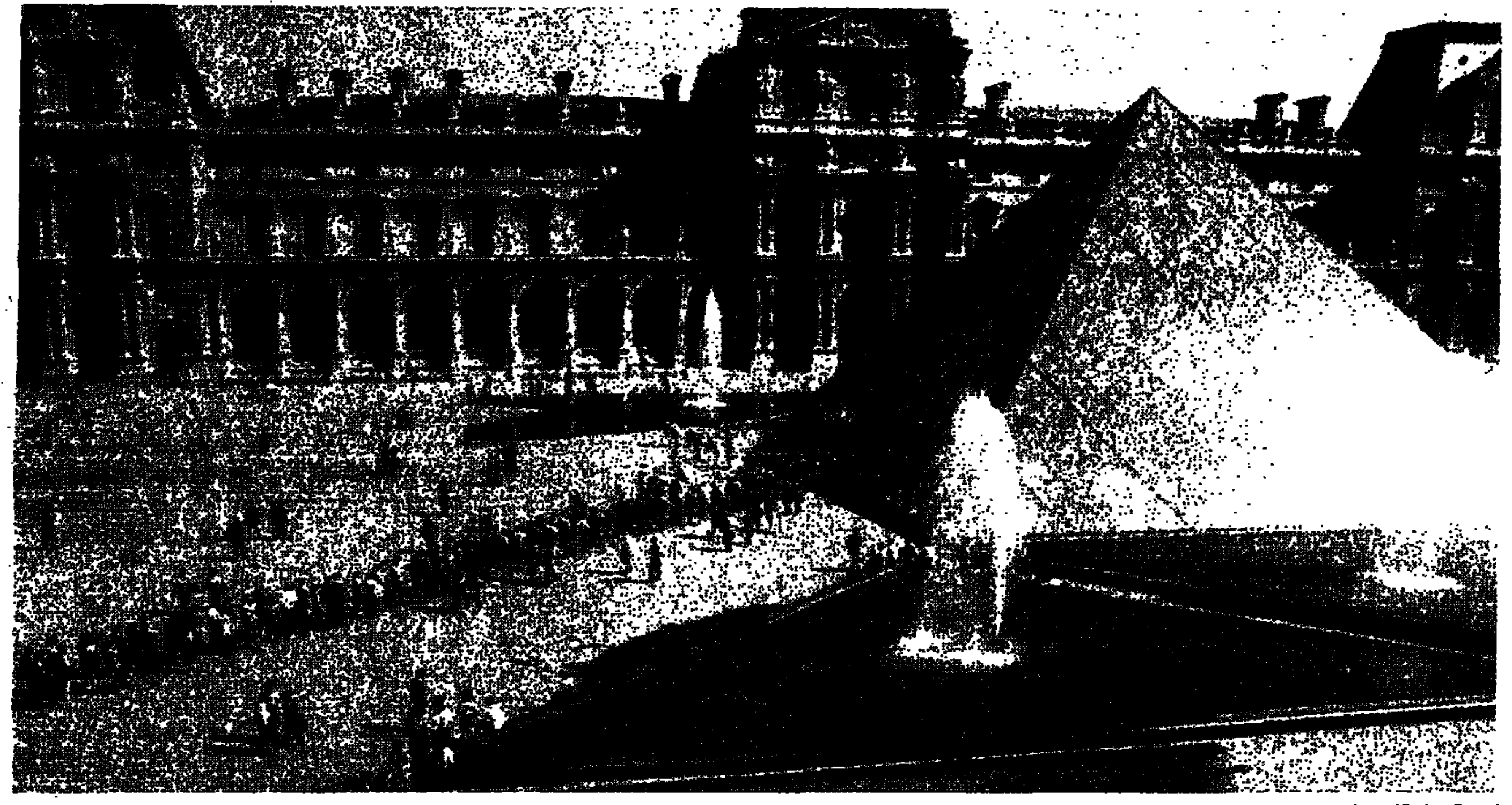


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

The ancients in Paris

THE NEWLY renovated Egyptian Department at the Louvre will be opened tomorrow by the French President, Jacques Chirac, in a ceremony which will be attended by Farouk Hosni, minister of culture, together with leading French and Egyptian intellectuals.

The Louvre's Egyptian holdings are the most popular part of its collection, and, following renovations, have now been allocated 60 per cent more exhibition space. Some 5000 works will now be displayed in a suite of 30 rooms.

The aim of the renovations, according to Christian Zeiglere, head of the Egyptian Department, is to present the museum's holdings "in a more coherent, spacious and inviting manner." In addition to the Pharaonic artefacts, many items dating from the Greco-Roman and Coptic periods will be displayed for the first time.

And tonight, the Louvre sees another opening, a major exhibition of paintings by Farouk Hosni. Recent works by the minister of culture will be displayed for a month before being transferred to Vienna.

Securing the future

Maj. Gen. Selmi Selim, new head of Luxor City Council, told Amira Ibrahim that the economic development of the city was an integral part of its security



Selmi Selim

Last Thursday, the Temple of Hatshepsut opposite Luxor was the scene of a grand ceremony in which candles were lit and flowers placed at the scene of the 17 November massacre to commemorate its 62 victims. The ceremony conveyed to the world the outrage of Egyptians as well as their grief and sorrow for what happened.

Luxor, though, whose thriving tourism industry was crippled by the slaughter, will need much more than a grandiose ceremony. Army Maj. Gen. Selmi Selim, new head of the Luxor City Council, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that his priorities were to improve security and grapple with Luxor's economic problems by launching development projects.

"Terrorism is an international phenomenon and terrorist attacks can occur anywhere in the world," said Selim, who was appointed to the post two weeks after the carnage. "A security lapse should not lead to the condemnation of the entire security system, which is discharging its duties and performing in an outstanding way." Any police officers suspected of dereliction of duty will be punished in accordance with the law, Selim added.

Tighter security has already been enforced. Police are deployed in and around vital streets and buildings, and armoured vehicles are positioned at every tourist site. Police checkpoints and electronic gates have been set up at the entrance of every temple. And Selim, a former commander of the Central Military Zone, said that the participation of the armed forces is being "actively considered."

"Improved security is necessary to regain people's confidence," Selim said. "When the people realise we are willing to share their troubles, they will certainly feel more secure. Serving the people and helping to solve their problems is an integral part of security."

Following the attack, Nile cruise boats have shut down and occupancy rates in hotels have plummeted. Some people working in the tourism industry have been made redundant while others are facing cuts in salaries. In order to deal with this situation and absorb unemployment the Social Development Fund has announced projects worth LE8.5 million.

"We are mainly concerned with helping small merchants and vendors who earn their living day-by-day," Selim said. "Big investors have agreed that there should be no lay-offs and that a compromise would be worked out until the city gets over the crisis," he said, alluding to wage reductions. "They have also agreed to reduce prices by 25 per cent to encourage foreign residents of Egypt to visit the city and to organise low-priced trips for university students."

"This will not make up for our losses, but something is better than nothing," commented Hamed, the owner of a horse-drawn carriage.

Also on Selim's agenda is a revival of the New Thebes project, an extension to the city where government offices will be relocated. A UNESCO scheme to replan Luxor and turn it into an open museum is also under consideration. Projects to improve the city's infrastructure will also be carried out in the immediate future.

Mahmoud Abdel-Dayem, an herbalist trading in the city's *souq*, said that before the attack the winter season had been promising and many traders had invested in stock worth thousands of pounds. But very few people are buying now, although he is selling some items at half price.

At the Karnak temple 300 seasonal workers, employed to clean the monument, have been laid off while outside the temple the owners of small bazaars had little else to do except play football and backgammon.

One of them, Abdel-Haq Abdel-Basset, said that the effects of the Social Development Fund projects will take some time before they are felt. "What we need now," he insisted, "is immediate action to deal with the economic problem."

At the Luxor temple, the number of foreign visitors has dropped from 4,000 a day to 70-80. Hundreds of Egyptian students flock to the site every day, but they pay no entrance fee.

Mahmoud Abdallah, a Luxor resident who has worked as a tourist guide for over 20 years, said that he, along with 400 other guides living in Luxor, have lost 95 per cent of their income. He does not expect a revival of tourism before the summer.

Better relations welcomed

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak said on Tuesday that he hoped for improved relations with Sudan and Iran. while stressing that Egypt equally sought good relations with Israel. reports **Nevine Khalil**. During a tour of Al-Obour city. east of Cairo. Mubarak would not confirm that Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir planned to visit Cairo soon. Mubarak said he had "only heard of reports" to this effect but added that "we hope to normalise relations with Sudan again and the sooner we do this the better."

Asked about improved relations between Egypt and Iran. especially after Foreign Minister Amr Moussa's participation in an Islamic summit in Tehran. Mubarak underscored the importance of developments on that front. "There is nothing except that the foreign minister went to Iran," he said. The president expressed hope. however. that "the differences between [Egypt and Iran] will be resolved because I seek good relations with all the countries."

Mubarak also welcomed improved ties with Israel, but urged it to "remove the obstacles" hindering progress in the peace process. "There is no problem between Egypt and Israel," he said. "The issue is peace in the region because. without it. the situation will be further complicated."

Mubarak said there was "nothing new" in the current efforts to achieve a breakthrough in the peace process which has been deadlocked for the past nine months.





Mubarak uncovers a plaque to initiate the second phase of the Mubarak National Housing Plan in Al-Obour city (l); and handed over apartment contracts to the new owners there

Cairo seeks 'gentlemen's agreement' with Tehran

Egypt and Iran are inching closer to each other despite persistent differences. **Dina Ezzat**, back from Tehran where she attended the OIC conference, explores the potential for improved ties

Are Cairo and Tehran considering an exchange of ambassadors some time soon? Although the two capitals are warming up to each other — which became clear during last week's summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in the Iranian capital — the answer remains elusive.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. who led Egypt's delegation to the summit. met in Tehran with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, his Iranian opposite number Kamal Kharazi and Hashemi Rafsanjani, the influential chairman of the Expediency Council.

"Iran is an important country in the region," Moussa said following the meetings. "There is a better understanding between the two countries now."

A similar view was expressed by the Iranian leaders. "Together, Egypt and Iran are two important pillars in the region," said Khatami.

Rafsanjani added: "There are common views between the two countries. With the development of these views and the further exchange of views, Iran and Egypt can pave the way for a broader relationship."

Kharazi took things one step further. "First. we have to establish the relations and then upgrade these relations to an exchange of ambassadors."

The question is when. Officials on both sides were unwilling to spell out a tentative schedule for upgrading relations, which are now limited to "interest sections" in the two capitals. Although the two sides expressed willingness to see relations fully restored. they conceded that certain differences must be settled first.

According to Moussa, the two nations can work on "bridging the gap" and try to resolve their differences. Sounding optimistic, he said: "We are looking ahead to the future as we attempt to foster relations with Iran."

One of Egypt's principal concerns has been Iran's attempt to export its Islamic revolution and its suspected support for Islamist militants acting to undermine the Cairo government. While in Tehran, Moussa asserted that "there should be no interference in the internal affairs of Muslim countries and no support for any group that terrorises Muslim societies."

The Iranians. for their part. disclaim any responsibility for the activities of Egyptian militants. "Basically. we are not involved in Egyptian affairs," Kharazi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The people of Egypt and the government of Egypt will have to solve this issue. We are not going to interfere in Egypt's domestic affairs."

An issue that irks the Iranians is Egypt's relations with Israel and its sponsorship of the Arab-Israeli peace process. "I believe that if Cairo distances itself from the Israelis. this will help the growth of Egyptian-Iranian relations," Kharazi said. He and other Iranian leaders believe that the peace process has been a fiasco and it is time to bring down the curtain on it.

The Iranian position is in flat contradiction to one of the principal targets of Egyptian diplomacy. Cairo is committed to the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region which an official source described as an Egyptian "strategic interest."

This official said that the current chill in Egyptian-Israeli relations was caused by the intransigent policies of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. "If the Iranians view this as Egypt distancing itself from Israel, this does not mean that Egypt will go back on its peace treaty with Israel or stop supporting the Palestinians to make a peace deal with the Israelis," the official said.

Cairo's commitment to peace means that it expects Iran to stop supporting the Islamist anti-peace Palestinian groups because this would weaken Yasser Arafat's position "and this is not what Egypt wants," the official said.

Another bone of contention is relations with Syria. Neither Cairo nor Tehran seems prepared to see Damascus getting too close to the other side.

"There are other regional factors and developments" that could speed up or slow down the pace of the move toward normalising Egyptian-Iranian relations, Kharazi said in an indirect allusion to relations between Tehran and Washington.

While in Tehran for the OIC summit, Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia conveyed a message to the Iranians from the United States "about the need to open communication channels," said an informed Iranian source.

And at a news conference last Sunday, Khatami spoke of the need to open a dialogue with the American people. "I would like to express my respect to the nation and great people of the United States," Khatami said. "I hope that in the not too distant future, I will be able to address the American people."

If this happens, the Iranian source said. Egypt and Iran will certainly take quicker steps toward upgrading their diplomatic representation. And the opposite may be true.

Both Moussa and Kharazi said the two sides decided to exchange delegations in different fields to keep up the momentum and add to the warmth of relations.

"We hope that the exchange of delegations and visits and regional cooperation would facilitate a better understanding and prepare the ground for establishing relations," Kharazi said. He explained that cooperation could be both political and economic.

Sources suggest that the Iranians seem to be the more eager to speed up the pace of restoring relations. "Normalising relations with Egypt would open the door for better Iranian relations with several Arab states," a source said. "This is what the Iranians are after: breaking out of two decades of West-imposed isolation."

Egypt, too, stands to win an important and wealthy ally with great political and economic clout in the region.

But each country wants to play on its own terms. So, what is needed. Moussa said, is a "gentleman's agreement" on what relations should be like.

FGM pressure tool rejected

A coalition of feminists fighting the practice of female genital mutilation objected to attempts by foreign donors to sensationalise or politicise the issue, reports **Mariz Tadros**

The FGM Taskforce, an umbrella group of feminists, activists and half a dozen NGOs opposing female genital mutilation, said last week that attempts by foreign agencies and donors to sensationalise or politicise the issue would only obstruct its efforts to eradicate the practice.

"We relate to FGM as a development issue," the Taskforce said in a position paper. "Organisations who wish to support our efforts in combating FGM should have a consistent approach to the multiple issues of development."

In an indirect allusion to the conspicuously extensive attention and funding allocated by foreign bodies specifically for the eradication of FGM, the paper said: "Their approaches to development, their programmes and recommendations should be consistent and reflective of an integrated vision."

Marie Assaad, chairwoman of the Taskforce, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "no big funding will tempt us...We won't be pushed into anything just because there is funding available when there is a lot of politicisation, a misunderstanding of why we are doing this." Assaad, in particular, rejected funding from USAID.

The Taskforce lashed out at the inconsistency in denouncing FGM as a violation of basic human rights while "closing an eye to health policies which deprive poor women of their basic right of access to the minimal requirements of primary health care".

Alluding to reported Congressional threats to cut off aid to Egypt unless FGM was outlawed, Assaad said: "We don't want it [FGM] to be a source of political pressure on us or on our government. We have been hearing all kinds of voices from the West. We are saying that it is not by pushing us that you put across the message."

For Assaad, it is essential that the struggle to eradicate the practice does not involve victimising people. It is a message that "some extremely angry foreign feminists who want absolute condemnation, who want to cut off all help" must understand, she said.

The position paper also denounced foreign intervention which sought to overturn a court ruling in favour of FGM. Appeals made to the president of the republic and Egyptian state bodies were unacceptable, being in violation of the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary and the "principles of democracy that generations in this country have been fighting for. We would be much better served without" this kind of support, stated the paper.

The court ruling had quashed a ministerial decree that banned the practice in government hospitals and private clinics. It was publicised by the Western media as a success for the Islamists and a setback for efforts to eradicate the practice. However, an administrative court has accepted an appeal by Health Minister Ismail Sallam "in form" but referred it to the Higher Administrative Court to rule on its "substance".

Amira Bahieddin, a lawyer, insists that new legislation is not necessary to deal with the issue because it is already covered by the current laws, a position which is upheld by the Taskforce. "There is no legal code for punishing those who cut off a finger or break a leg or circumcise a girl; there is a general penal code for those who commit an action which causes a deformity, a permanent disability, and this is punishable by imprisonment of three to five years," explained Bahieddin. She said that parents could also be prosecuted for being accomplices in the "crime".

As for non-medical practitioners, they are not only subject to punishment for deforming a human being, but also for what amounts to sexual harassment because they are not qualified and authorised to handle the sex organs of girls, she argued.

According to the Demographic Health Survey, 97 per cent of Egyptian females are circumcised. The standard operation involves the partial excision of the clitoris and possibly the labia minora and is performed by doctors, paramedics and even barbers, using a razor blade.

The position paper rejected the argument put forward by some doctors that the operation is not a health hazard. "It is to the detriment of the medical profession and medical ethics to find doctors in this country who advocate the practice of FGM, while knowing more than anybody else that there is no such authorised medical procedure," the paper said.

Some doctors suggested that the operation be confined to the removal of the hood of the clitoris, but this, too, was rejected by the anti-FGM activists. "Removing the hood of the clitoris has never been taught in medical school," said gynaecologist Ezzeddin Osman. "After working for 40 years as a gynaecological surgeon, I would find it impossible to remove the hood of the clitoris, even if I had a surgical microscope or laser facilities."

The Taskforce's next step will be to disseminate information to NGOs about how to convey different messages about FGM to different people, said Assaad. The Taskforce is acting more than ever before to de-politicise the issue. This is why their final word goes to the non-Egyptian activists: "It is already a struggle over several fronts. It does not need additional ones."



photo: Aref Saadeddin

El-Alfi lost his temper during the trial of six *Al-Shaab* journalists

Courtroom drama

The trial of six *Al-Shaab* journalists, on charges of slandering former Interior Minister El-Alfi, last Saturday turned into a simple slanging-match. **Khaled Dawoud** watched the breakdown of law and order

Since Hassan El-Alfi lost his position as interior minister on 18 November, one day after the Luxor massacre, many observers assumed that interest in the libel case he had filed against six journalists working for *Al-Shaab* newspaper would fade. The newspaper is the mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party.

But those expectations proved unfounded when hearings resumed on Saturday. The large courtroom was packed by El-Alfi's supporters, as well as partisans of *Al-Shaab*, and the two sides quickly became embroiled in a slanging-match, trading insults and accusations.

El-Alfi's supporters, mainly family relations from his hometown of Abu-Kebir in Sharqiya province, along with several police officers who were demoted after he lost his post, sat on the right side of the courtroom. Journalists from *Al-Shaab*, including the six defendants, and their lawyers sat on the left side next to the empty dock. The defendants are *Al-Shaab*'s editor-in-chief Magdi Ahmed Hussein, his uncle and prominent Labour Party figure Adel Hussein, journalists Salah Bedeiwi, Hoda Mackawi, Mohamed Eid and cartoonist Essam El-Sharkawi. The six could face up to three years imprisonment if convicted. Labour Party leader Ibrahim Shukri is also being sued by El-Alfi for compensation.

Tension was hanging in the air and pandemonium broke loose as soon as El-Alfi entered the courtroom at 11.30am. He was accompanied by his former chief of public relations Raouf El-Manawi, the former chief of his security team Ahmed El-Foli and former industry minister Fouad Abu-Zaghla. El-Alfi was also accompanied by the same team of prominent defence lawyers, thus quashing rumours that they would abandon the case after their client lost his position.

The confrontation began with El-Alfi's supporters cheering and shouting: "Long live Alfi! Long live Alfi!" Journalist Bedeiwi, who has a long history of participating in demonstrations, stood on a bench on the other side of the courtroom and shouted back: "To hell with Alfi! To hell with Alfi!" Adel Hussein, who is over 60, also joined other El-Alfi opponents who were standing on benches and shouting anti-El-Alfi slogans. "Habak, Habak...Miami, Miami...Salhiya, Salhiya," they shouted, turning the headlines of the corruption charges *Al-Shaab* had levelled against El-Alfi into a taunting refrain.

In a fierce and unprecedented five-week campaign in August and September, *Al-Shaab* accused El-Alfi of selling for LE600,000 in 1996 a villa he had bought in 1993 for LE80,000. The buyer was Abdel-Wahab El-Habak, the former head of a public sector company who was sentenced earlier this year to 10 years imprisonment on corruption charges. *Al-Shaab* alleged that the deal was sealed after it had become public knowledge that El-Habak was involved in financial malpractices. It also claimed that the high price paid for the villa was a reward for a promise from El-Alfi to help El-Habak dodge trial. In addition to the imprisonment sentence, El-Habak was fined a staggering LE180 million, the equivalent of the money which he had illegally appropriated. Abu-Zaghla reportedly mediated the deal between El-Alfi and El-Habak.

Al-Shaab also accused El-Alfi's two sons, Ala'a and Adel, of using their father's influence to make lucrative business deals, including the acquisition of land in a desert-reclamation project at El-Salhiya as well as a building complex at Miami, Alexandria.

El-Alfi's supporters responded to the charges by accusing *Al-Shaab* of acting as a mouthpiece for terrorist groups. Security men had to intervene to separate the two sides. *Al-Shaab*'s lawyers asked security men to kick El-Alfi's supporters out, describing them as "thugs". But the security men refused because the trial was open to the public.

As tension mounted, El-Alfi appeared to have lost his temper, telling his lawyers that he was completely dismayed by what was happening.

After an hour-long confrontation, Judge Ibrahim Shabana finally entered the courtroom and opened the hearings. *Al-Shaab*'s lawyers immediately demanded that El-Alfi be summoned to the witness stand, in order to confront him with alleged "documents proving his corruption." The ex-minister's lawyers responded that he was ready to testify. But the judge, after a surprisingly short session, decided to adjourn hearings until 9 March to allow *Al-Shaab*'s lawyers time to study documents they had requested last month. These include the budgets of public sector companies which, *Al-Shaab* claimed, paid bribes to police.

The adjournment of the case until 9 March caused confusion because Judge Shabana, in last month's session, had decided to hold three consecutive days of hearings on 13, 14 and 15 December. The delay triggered speculations that an attempt might be under way to reach an out-of-court settlement. For the past two weeks, *Al-Shaab* has refrained from attacking El-Alfi.

Opposition's democratic reform platform

Opposition parties and forces have agreed on a joint programme for political reform which included for the first time their definition of what democracy is all about. **Fatemah Farag** reports

Although opposition parties and forces rallied to the government's side in the war against terrorism, they also underlined the need for political reform to make the government system more credible and effective. At the end of a three-day conference on 9 December, representatives of the opposition signed what they called a Programme for Political and Constitutional Reform, spelling out the basic tenets of their definition of democracy. As expected, the Luxor massacre imposed itself over discussions. Participants in the "Democracy Conference" were the Wafd, Labour, Liberal, Nasserist and Tagammu parties as well as the illegal Muslim Brotherhood and the Communists.

The sessions which led up to the final document covered the following headings: the Constitution, the Emergency Law, Syndicate and Media Freedoms, Pressure Groups, and Economic and Social Freedoms. Non-party intellectuals such as Said El-Naggar and Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed also participated in various sessions, giving the conference academic as well as political significance.

The participants agreed that the core of democratic reform is the rotation of authority within the political system. The basic tenets of democracy were outlined as freedom of religion, expression, association and formation of political parties. Also affirmed was the need to end the state of emergency as well as all forms of exceptional judicial action such as putting civilians on trial before military courts, and to allow political activities at universities and factories within the limits of the law.

Regarding the issue of human rights, the document demanded that prisons be removed from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior; human rights groups be allowed to monitor prison conditions; legislation be amended to provide severe punishment for crimes of torture; and Law 57/1968, which empowers the minister of the interior to designate areas other than prisons for detention, be repealed.

Last, but not least, the document strongly condemned all forms of terrorism and called for the protection of national unity.

Although the document was approved unanimously, some sharp differences were voiced during the discussion sessions. All the papers and comments were sent to Hussein Abdel-Razeq, a member of the political bureau of the leftist Tagammu Party and de-facto coordinator of the conference, to draft the final document. On the last day of the conference, three points of disagreement came up. The first was made by Mahmoud Abaza and other Wafdists who felt that a programme of reform was too much and that a statement of intent would suffice. The second was made by Ahmed Sharaf, a representative of the Communists, who said that the section on economic and social freedoms did not reflect the discussions which took place and the decisions taken in the course of the discussions. The two objections were overruled. The third was brought up by the Brotherhood and its ally, the Labour Party, regarding a paragraph in the document which drew attention to an article in the Constitution stipulating that *Sharia* (Islamic law) is the principal source of legislation. This paragraph, which pointed out that *Sharia* was subject to various interpretations, was eventually removed in deference to the argument that the Constitutional article has never been problematic.

The importance of the document, and political reform in general, was succinctly highlighted by the Wafd Party. Its chairman, Fouad Serageddin, pointed out that the phenomenon of terrorism was a result of the lack of democracy and the restrictions imposed on the activities of political parties. Gamal Badawi, editor-in-chief of the party's newspaper *Al-Wafd*, added that a "democratic uprising" was needed or else terrorism would persist.

This point appears to have the consensus of all, even non-partisan personalities. Since the Luxor massacre there have been quite a few intellectuals coming out strongly in favour of political reform. These include prominent writers and researchers such as Wahid Abdel-Meguid, Fahmy Howeidy, and Sayyed Yassin.

Yassin, former head of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, wrote in *Al-Ahram* last week that Egyptian political life is running within a closed circle, which will ultimately result in a fake consensus. Like the participants in the conference, he underlined the need to amend the Constitution and end the state of emergency which, he argued, resulted in unhealthy political apathy. He pointed out that "the contradictions which exist in Egyptian economic, social and cultural life can only be confronted by expanding the framework of democracy and opening a true national dialogue."

Next week, a coordination committee will discuss a working plan for the implementation of the programme and establishing priorities of action. These include sending the programme to important personalities as well as the ruling National Democratic Party [NDP] and organising wider discussions in the future.



Shura Council denounces 'foreign hands'

Unlike the People's Assembly, the Shura Council is blaming "foreign states and parties" for the Luxor massacre. **Gamal Essam El-Din** listened in on the debate in the Upper House

This week it was the turn of Shura Council members to speak out about the Luxor massacre. But unlike the People's Assembly which blamed militant violence on deeply-rooted socio-economic factors, the Shura Council seems convinced that the recent terrorist attacks have been masterminded and funded by "foreign states and parties". Moreover, it is the timing of the Luxor massacre, not its scale or the fact that its organisation still remains shrouded in mystery, that seemed to provide the Council with the basic rationale for reaching this conclusion.

A 58-page report prepared by the Council noted that the attack took place on the opening day of the International Travel and Tourism Conference in London, in which Egypt was participating in the hope of increasing its already large numbers of foreign visitors. The massacre, the report added, was carried out at the start of the winter season, during which tourists traditionally visit Egypt, particularly Luxor, in their droves to spend their Christmas holidays there.

The attack followed Egypt's success in riding out the potentially damaging effects of a terrorist attack in September on a tourist bus in Cairo's Tahrir Square in which nine Germans and their Egyptian driver were killed, the report said.

The Luxor massacre also coincided with Egypt's decision to boycott the Middle East-North Africa economic cooperation conference in Doha and its declared opposition to an American military strike against Iraq, the report added.

The report further cited Egypt's self-reliant approach to socio-economic development and its ability to launch mega-development projects as further corroboration of the foreign conspiracy theory.

The Council, "after closely reviewing what has been published and broadcast about this criminal act, finds that those who opened fire on innocent people in Luxor are a filthy handful of criminals with connections to foreign countries and parties which provide the necessary funds to finance their operations and which mastermind their terrorist acts at the right time and place to serve their objective of striking at Egypt's heart," the report said.

Although the Council did not name the alleged conspirators, the report urged European countries, particularly Britain, to "shut their doors in the face of terrorists seeking shelter and to expel the ones who already enjoy their protection."

The report added: "The point will come when these terrorists will no longer care about the security of Britain itself, because those who betray their nation and religion are equally ready to cause trouble in the land that provides them with shelter."

Rifaat El-Said, secretary-general of the leftist Tagammu Party, asked in rhetorical terms: "Is it possible that this terrorist act was funded and masterminded by a handful of terrorists hiding in nearby mountains and sugar-cane fields? Is it a coincidence that they chose the opening day of the International Travel and Tourism Conference in London to commit their crime? It is obvious that there are devilish foreign hands behind their operation. These fugitive terrorists and criminals are sheltered by European countries. How can European countries speak of human rights while they provide haven to poisonous terrorist snakes?"

El-Said also lashed out at the domestic press and media "for their very limited success in fighting terrorism and extremism." He noted that some national newspapers "give a great deal of space in their pages to certain Islamist writers who are skillful in justifying the acts of the militants, and even prepare the ground for them."

George Rizk, a lawyer and appointed member of the Council, also argued that "foreign hands" must be behind the terrorist attacks which have been taking place since 1992. "The Egyptian people, Muslims and Christians, have always been tied by bonds of love. Terrorist criminals, funded by foreign elements, will never be able to disrupt this immortal relationship of mutual love and respect," Rizk said.

Osama El-Ghazali Harb, editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram's *Al-Siyassa Al-Dawliya* [International Politics], while admitting that foreign hands may have been behind the Luxor massacre, urged Egyptians not to close their eyes to the fact that "there are aspects of negligence at home that need to be addressed quickly." "We are living in a democratic regime which is always ready to listen to criticism and acknowledge mistakes... We still lack the necessary seriousness, efficiency and discipline. The security forces should recognise that they are no longer facing groups of frivolous boys but the challenge of organised terrorism that is masterminded by foreign forces. Next time, the slightest negligence could lead to an even bigger disaster."

Businessman Mohamed Farid Khamis provided an economic rationale for the foreign conspiracy theory. He said the attack was staged after Egypt had won international acclaim for successfully implementing the first phase of an IMF-inspired economic reform programme. The attack, he added, also followed Egyptian action to tap the potential of economic cooperation with African and Southeast Asian countries. "These ambitious policies are frowned upon by certain hostile international forces which hate to see Egypt play a leading role. They are always anxious to see Egypt confined within its own borders, and busy only with its own affairs," Khamis said.

Khamis, however, also mentioned social ills as one of the factors behind militant violence. He was the only Council member to do so. "Official statistics for 1996 show that [among Egypt's 26 provinces] Assiut has the highest percentage of poverty, 35.4 per cent, of extreme poverty that is tantamount to destitution, 25.8 per cent, and of unemployment, 13 per cent. This requires us all to give utmost priority to development projects in Upper Egypt, in terms of an integrated network of roads, harbours, airports, hospitals, schools and sports facilities. This can help revolutionise the customs and traditions of Upper Egypt, making the people there more enlightened," he said.

This argument angered Mohamed Farid Zakaria, an independent, who said that terrorist acts that targeted the World Trade Centre in New York and the Paris subway were not motivated by poverty. Terrorist acts in Egypt are the response to President Mubarak defending Arab rights, Zakaria said.

'He was here... and we met'


Tantawi


Lau

At a meeting with the Chief Rabbi of Israel, the Imam of Al-Azhar turned down an invitation to visit Israel and to issue a joint statement condemning terrorism. **Amira Howeidy** reports

In the first meeting of its kind in living memory, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, held talks on Monday with Israel's Chief Rabbi Yisrael Lau, who was visiting Cairo at the invitation of President Hosni Mubarak.

The one-hour meeting was the first ever between a Sheikh of Al-Azhar, the supreme religious authority in Egypt, and an Israeli rabbi since Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty in 1979. Tantawi's predecessor, the late Sheikh Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq always refused to meet Israelis during his tenure.

"I asked the rabbi to use his position as the supreme Jewish religious official to counsel the Israeli prime minister to stop showing intransigence in his opposition to the peace process and to apply international and bilateral accords which have been agreed," Tantawi said.

Such a change in the policies of Binyamin Netanyahu would "spare the region a great catastrophe for which the intransigent party would have to bear the responsibility before future generations," Tantawi added.

Lau said he asked Tantawi, in turn, to "use his influence with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to urge the Palestinian side also to give up its intransigence." The Palestinians, Lau added, were also urged "not to seek what is impossible so that the two sides may find a compromise reconciling the interests of the peoples of the region."

In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Tantawi said he turned down a request by Lau to sign a joint statement condemning terrorism. "He proposed that we publish a common declaration to fight terrorism. I told him if he wanted to issue such a statement, it would be wiser if dignitaries from Islam, Christianity and Judaism met somewhere and published a joint statement [against terrorism] because it would be more useful."

Tantawi also turned down Lau's invitation to visit Israel. "I refused because I did not think I should visit it now." Asked if this meant that a visit was possible in the future, Tantawi replied, "I will not visit Israel now or ever... until I die."

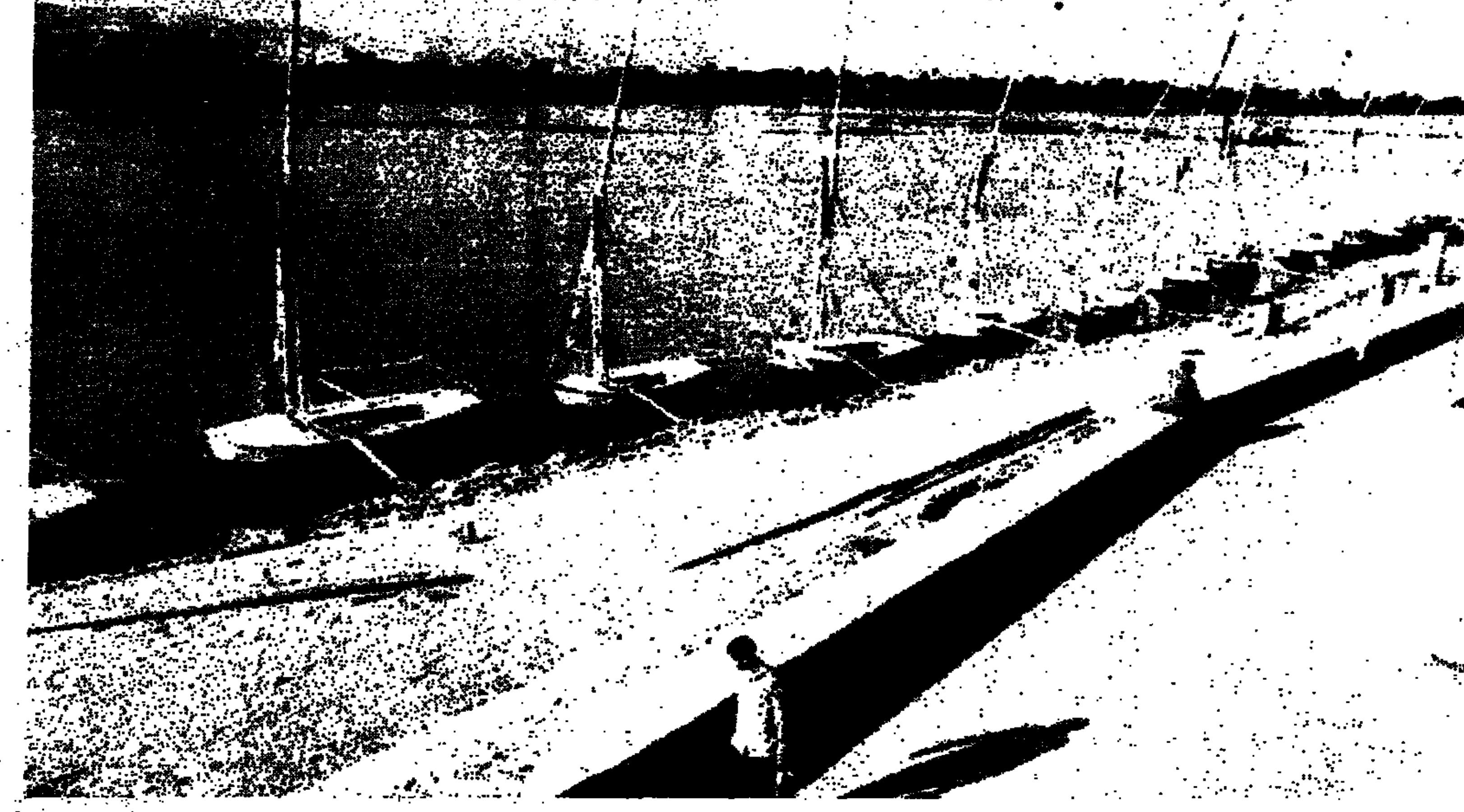
Responding to a question as to whether the meeting with Lau indicated that Al-Azhar was starting to play a political role to try and reactivate the stalled peace process, Tantawi said: "This meeting has no political significance whatsoever. He was in Egypt, met with the president and then met with me; that is all there is to it."

Tantawi added that Lau discussed with him the issue of suicide attacks in the Occupied Territories, "and I told him that suicide operations against women and children are forbidden in Islam, but martyrdom is justified in operations targeting an enemy or an army."

Before the meeting with Tantawi, Lau met with President Mubarak for an hour and a half, telling reporters that he was using religion as a "bridge to peace."

"Religion is the most dangerous weapon created by mankind," Lau said, "but when we use religion, as I do, as a bridge to peace, this is the strongest ideal bridge."

Lau said he "promised President Mubarak that he will never hear a religious leader or an Israeli in any synagogue in Israel speaking up for terror... I can say on behalf of the religious leadership that we want peace."


photo: Randa Shaath

Following the Luxor attack, floating hotels have shut down and occupancy rates in other hotels plummeted sharply. Felucca rides, one of the hallmarks of a visit to Luxor, have all but disappeared, leaving the feluccas and their owners sitting idly in the sun

Terrorists in cyberspace

Moving ahead with the times, both the government and Islamist militants have taken their war to the Internet. **Amira Howeidy** accesses two rival sites

The State Information Service (SIS) is using cyberspace technology to expose militant leaders living abroad, whom the government accuses of planning and financing terrorist acts back home, including the 17 November massacre in Luxor. Issuing a "Call to combat terrorism," the Service has added to its one-year-old Internet web site the names and pictures of 14 fugitive terrorists, together with some background information. Previously, the site only provided news about Egyptian politics and the national economy.

The Egyptian call for European countries, particularly Britain, to extradite terrorists who have taken refuge there has so far met with little, if any, response. Unbowed, the SIS web site declared: "Terrorists do not recognise any boundaries... To combat such a phenomenon, the international community is under an obligation to work collectively in order to deny such terrorists any safe haven. Giving them refuge, on any pretext whatsoever, is tantamount to condoning their... activities."

Three weeks ago, President Hosni Mubarak chastised Britain, in particular, for granting asylum to Egyptians convicted by Egyptian courts and said that this policy had caused the death of British citizens. "If the world community had cooperated in combatting terrorism, this would not have happened," Mubarak said. "Terrorists are protected in countries like England on the pretext of [defending] human rights, but these countries should also show respect for the rights of the victims who were murdered," he said.

Echoing this view, other Egyptian officials, including presidential adviser Osama El-Baz, said Cairo expected cooperation from European countries. But he also went far beyond the figure of 14 wanted fugitives, saying "the figure is closer to 30."

Analysts say the idea behind putting the names of wanted terrorists on the web site is no more than an attempt to expose them. They noted that some of those named, such as Yasser Tawfiq El-Serri, live openly in Britain and have recently been quoted not only by the foreign press but also in Egyptian newspapers. Moreover, the site does not guide users to hot lines or indicate any specific action they should take if they identify the militants.

Ironically, the Gama'a, who took responsibility for the Luxor massacre, now have their own web site, which features their magazine *Al-Murabeton* as well as the statements they put out. These include the two contradictory statements issued last week, the first declaring an end to attacks against tourists and the second denying the first.

The headquarters of the web site are unknown. Montasser El-Zayyat, a lawyer and de facto Gama'a spokesman, denied knowing anything about the site, except its address.

The site appears in Arabic, indicating the Gama'a's wish to address an exclusively Arab readership. According to a source close to the group, the Gama'a chose to appear in Arabic "to address their targeted public in their language" and also to avoid possible mis-interpretations in an English-language translation.

The web site also includes articles assailing the Egyptian government and exhorting women to wear the *niqab*.

Names listed on the SIS web site include:

• Ayman Mohamed El-Zawahri, 46, head of the military wing of the underground Jihad group, sentenced to three years imprisonment in the case against the Jihad organisation in 1981, implicated in the attempt on the life of former Interior Minister Zaki Badr and accused of "planning several terrorist operations" in Egypt.

• Yasser Tawfiq El-Serri, 35, sentenced to death for the attempt on the life of former Prime Minister Atef Sidki, founder, manager and financier of the underground *Talaei El-Fath* organisation [Vanguards of Conquest] and founder of the Islamic Monitor in London, a mouthpiece for his organisation.

• Adel El-Sayed Mohamed Abdel-Qoddous, 36, sentenced to death for the attempt on the life of Sidki, principal leader of the Vanguards of Conquest and supervisor of terrorist camps abroad.

• Mustafa Hamza, 40, leader of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya military wing, sentenced to death in the so-called Returnees from Afghanistan case and for the assassination attempt on former Interior Minister Zaki Badr. He was also sentenced to seven years imprisonment in the Sadat assassination case, accused by a military court of membership of paramilitary clandestine organisations attempting to overthrow the government and of possessing weapons and explosives for use in terrorist activities. Hamza was also a key player in the assassination attempt against President Mubarak in Addis Ababa two years ago.

• Othman El-Sayed, 31, sentenced to hard labour for life in a criminal case and suspected terrorist.

• Tharwat Salah Abdallah, 37, sentenced to death and three years imprisonment in two separate cases, one of which concerned the Sidki assassination attempt.

• Osama Rushdi Ali Khalifa, 38, previously convicted in the Sadat assassination.

• Refai Ahmed Taha, 43, Gama'a leader who was sentenced to five years imprisonment in the Sadat assassination case, and thought to receive financial assistance from Iran.

Other persons named are Hussein Ahmed Shmeit Ali, Islam Ahmed Mohamed Ibrahim El-Ghamri, Mohamed Shawki El-Islambouli and Adel Abdel-Meguid.

New crackdown on the Gama'a

Police killed two "leading" Gama'a members and rounded up many others in a new clampdown. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

In the Nile Delta city of Tanta, 90 kilometres north of Cairo, police raided last Friday the hideout of an Islamist militant who had been sentenced to death in absentia along with four others in 1996 for the assassination of top police officers in the southern province of Assiut. The militant, Mounir Mustafa Abdel-Hafez, described as a leading member of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, was shot and killed in an exchange of fire with the security forces.

Security sources said Abdel-Hafez, who hails from Assiut, moved to the Delta to elude police and lived in the densely-crowded district of Seger in Tanta. According to the same sources, he attempted to revive Gama'a activities in the Delta region and managed to recruit several followers.

Police said they arrested in Tanta 10 men suspected of being Gama'a members with links to Abdel-Hafez. An automatic rifle, a pistol and important papers detailing Gama'a plans were seized from Abdel-Hafez, the Interior Ministry said. A security source who spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* on condition of anonymity said that Abdel-Hafez "personally took part in attacks against police officers in Assiut in 1993 and 1994, particularly the assassination of Maj. Gen. Abdel-Latif El-Shimi (the deputy security chief of Assiut)."

Almost at the same time, but at the Gama'a hotbed of Mallawi in Minya province, 260 kilometres south of Cairo, police raided sugarcane fields after they were tipped that a number of militants were hiding there. Police exchanged fire with the fugitives, killing one, who was later identified as Hamed Radi Abul-Ela. A policeman was also killed in the exchange. Security sources told the *Weekly* that Abul-Ela was a well-known member of the Gama'a's military wing and had taken part in several attacks against policemen in southern Egypt. The automatic rifle seized from Abul-Ela after his death, the sources said, had been used in at least five terrorist attacks against civilians and policemen in Minya province.

The sources confirmed reports that police in southern Egypt were examining the files of thousands of students to determine whether they have links to the Gama'a. Three out of the four identified attackers who carried out the Luxor massacre were students. Two other assailants remain unidentified. Police said dozens of students were detained but later released.

According to the French Press Agency, *AFP*, security forces launched a manhunt for a student who was allegedly linked to one of the Luxor attackers. Police sources were quoted as saying they believed that a law student at Assiut University, Yasser Abdel-Fattah Abdel-Aziz, "knows all the secrets" of the Luxor massacre because of his ties to one of the six assailants who were all killed following the carnage.

In Alexandria, police announced they arrested a Gama'a member who had been sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in absentia for robbing jewellery shops in order to finance Gama'a activities. Hussein Abdullah Abdel-Malek had been convicted of robbing Al-Amir jewellery shop in Qalyubiya province north of Cairo and taking part in other attacks against Copts and policemen.

The crackdown against the Gama'a is the first since Interior Minister Habib El-Adli took office one day after the Luxor massacre. A security source told the *Weekly* that the clampdown was part of a new security plan adopted by the Interior Ministry. "The minister's orders are not to make sweeping arrests on the basis of suspicion except in certain situations. We now try to target the right elements who are directly related to terrorist activities," the source said.

He added that the latest shootout in Mallawi in which Abul-Ela was killed took place after police intensified their presence, as well as that of secret agents, in the areas where the militants were believed to be hiding.

The clampdown against militants was tantamount to a government rejection of a so-called Gama'a initiative to stop acts of violence. Conflicting Gama'a statements on the Luxor attack, with one statement condemning the massacre and another affirming the Gama'a's responsibility for it, only served to strengthen government misgivings.

Many columnists and analysts now believe that the Gama'a, faced with the wide-scale local and international condemnation of the massacre, is trying to ease off the pressure by spreading the word about its readiness to negotiate and claiming that those who carried out the massacre were "young members of the group acting on their own."

Jihad Al-Khazen, eidtor-in-chief of the London-based daily *Al-Hayat*, wrote in a guest column in *Al-Ahram* on Monday that the Gama'a's call for dialogue should be disregarded. "When someone commits a crime, you don't open a dialogue with the killer, but he is put on trial... Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, which made attacks on tourists a basic part of its anti-government strategy, Al-Jihad group, which claims that it only targets Israeli tourists, and Al-Jihad Group-Islamic Vanguards of Conquest, are all terrorist organisations whose members are criminals devoid of any human feelings and of religion itself."

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Plus or minus 200,000

Palestinians launched their first ever population census, but in East Jerusalem, they ran into spiteful opposition from the Israeli government, writes **Graham Usher**

On 10 December, the Palestinian Authority (PA) honoured International Human Rights Day by launching the first ever population census conducted by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. No sooner had the 3,500 Palestinian recorders started collecting data, however, than they ran into Israeli attempts to block their work in occupied East Jerusalem.

Organised by the PA's Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the census aims to collect comprehensive and accurate information on every Palestinian household in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The census is seen as vital not only as an expression of PA sovereignty over its people, but also in forging effective government policy. "Without a census, we have no comprehensive system of information and, without this, an authority cannot plan well," said PCBS spokesman, Daoud Al-Deek.

This need is compounded by the fact that the current global estimate of 2.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is based on projections from a census carried out by Israel following the 1967 war. This survey was notoriously unreliable since it excluded Palestinians who had been driven out of the West Bank due to the war or who happened to be out of the country when the Israeli count took place. Even the figure of 170,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem is "a guess", says Israeli lawyer Daniel Seidemann. "The real figure could be 200,000 more or less, nobody knows, including Israel's Jerusalem municipality."

The need for hard data on Palestinian residency is thus essential, not only to see how many Palestinians live in the Occupied Territories, but also to know how many are entitled to live there. And this, says PCBS director, Hassan Abu Libdeh, includes East Jerusalem since "nowhere in the Oslo Accords is the PA forbidden to take a count of [Palestinian] residents in Jerusalem."

This, predictably, was not the Israeli government's reading. Denouncing the census in East Jerusalem as an attempt to "undermine Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem", on 9 December Binyamin Netanyahu instructed his internal security minister to use "21 ways to stop the census" in East Jerusalem.

Unfortunately for the Israeli leader none of the 21 ways were permissible according to the Gaza-Jericho Agreement Implementation Law which governs PA activity in East Jerusalem and was endorsed by the Knesset in December 1994. Under that law, the PA is not allowed to engage in activities of "assembly" or establish "representative offices" in East Jerusalem for the duration of Oslo's interim period. But nowhere does it say the PA is prohibited from conducting a census among East Jerusalem Palestinians.

Netanyahu's response to this "loophole" was to tell his Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi to prepare an amendment to the law which henceforth will outlaw all PA activities in East Jerusalem "of a governmental or political nature" which are not "in conformity with respect for Israeli sovereignty". Using a rare parliamentary procedure (the last time it was used was in 1981 when the government of Menachem Begin passed the law annexing the Golan Heights to Israel), on 10 December the Knesset pushed through the three readings of the amendment in a single day. It was eventually passed at midnight in a largely empty Knesset by 26 votes to 11.

After the Knesset decision, Abu Libdeh announced that should his recorders be denied access to East Jerusalem, the PCBS will use student surveys, faxes and "even private Israeli companies" to obtain the information it requires.

The amendment also makes the Israeli government's *stance on PA activity in East Jerusalem utterly* contradictory. Thus while the PA is now not allowed to hold a census in East Jerusalem, Palestinians in East Jerusalem were permitted to vote and stand for the PA's Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections in 1996. The PA also openly provides services to Palestinians in East Jerusalem, especially in the education sector where Palestinian schools follow the PA curriculum rather than the Israeli one.

Netanyahu's desire to get the amendment through may have had less to do with asserting "Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem" than with embarrassing his Labour-led opposition. And on this front he appears to have scored a direct hit.

During the Knesset debate, the former Labour leader, Shimon Peres, called on the government not to pass the amendment since he had "reason to believe the Palestinians would be willing to drop the matter". This referred to an agreement reportedly cooked up between Labour parliamentarian Yossi Beilin and PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat whereby the census would be carried out by "a neutral academic body" rather than by recorders from the PCBS.

But Peres was shot down by current Labour Leader Ehud Barak. Saying that the Labour Party "should not act as meditators between the elected government *and the Palestinians", Barak instructed Labour* members of parliament to vote for the amendment because "Jerusalem's unity and Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem are a cornerstone of our policy".

It was a whip defied by many Labour parliamentarians, especially after the two main Arab parties in the Knesset turned the vote on the amendment into a vote of no confidence in the government. Barak's stance also widened the schism between himself and Labour's main opposition partner, Meretz, who voted against the amendment.



A Palestinian woman standing on the rubble of her house which was demolished by the Israeli army. Israeli troops demolished two homes that belonged to Palestinian suicide bombers and sealed two others this week *(photo: Reuters)*

Ties of blood

Both the state and the people in Jordan reacted angrily to the execution of four Jordanian citizens in Iraq after they were convicted of smuggling car spare parts. **Lola Keilani** reports from Amman

"The blood of Jordanians is not cheap," King Hussein declared in a speech delivered earlier this week. He was denouncing the execution of four Jordanians in Iraq who were convicted of smuggling car spare parts worth less than $1,000. "We will not forgive any party that spills the blood of Jordanians," he added.

The King was infuriated by Iraq's *unexpected move, which has been in*ternationally condemned. This, however, was the first time he has openly expressed the desire to see a change in the ruling regime in Baghdad. "May God end their torture [the Iraqis], whether it comes from outside or from parties that deprive [Iraq] of everything," the King said. He added that he did not care if his criticism angered the Iraqi leadership or caused them to react by cutting the supply of oil to Jordan. Hussein said that the kingdom can find the oil it needs from other sources. The United States immediately announced its support for Amman and said it was ready to help Jor*dan overcome any problems that* might result from the deterioration of its ties with Baghdad.

Many Jordanians were surprised by the latest Iraqi move, particularly since Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is hardly in a position where he needs to find new enemies. If hostilities had to be opened on a new front, Jordan should have been Saddam's last choice, as it is through Jordan that Baghdad has been receiving 90 per cent of its food and supplies since the 1991 Gulf War.

Jordan imports more than 75,000 barrels of crude oil from Iraq daily. According to Jordanian economists, no country can beat Iraq's terms for supplying oil because Jordan is being charged well below market prices. The kingdom's energy needs, which are growing by 5 per cent annually, are *paid for through a system of barter* agreements and trade protocols for goods exported to Baghdad worth $250 million annually.

Meanwhile, Jordan's Minister of the Interior Natheer Rashid said that high-level contacts between the two countries have resulted in an Iraqi pledge to commute the death sentence against a fifth Jordanian, Ammar Shehabeddine, also convicted of smuggling spare parts.

The four Jordanians executed last week were initially charged in January 1996. They were later released after paying bail of two and a half million Iraqi dinars each. In April 1997, they were rearrested on the same charges and in September were sentenced to death.

Rashid added that Iraq had also agreed to release 10 Jordanian detainees, but the Iraqi ambassador in Jordan refused to confirm the minister's statements. The Iraqi ambassador, however, did confirm that his government had agreed to commute the death sentence against Shehabeddine.

The Jordanian authorities said they did not have exact figures for the number of Jordanians who are imprisoned or detained in Iraqi jails, but they estimated that they were in the "hundreds".

Following Jordan's angry reaction, the Iraqi authorities issued a statement saying that Baghdad was astonished by Jordan's attitude.

"Iraq is surprised at the fuss being made by the Jordanian government over the execution of four Jordanian criminals who committed crimes of trafficking which must be severely punished," the statement said.

Jordan's interior minister, Rashid, criticised the Iraqi government and said that the execution of the Jordanians "will badly affect the relationship" between the two neighbouring countries. "The incident is a bleeding wound which will not easily heal," he added.

The Jordanian authorities, including the Royal Court, had done everything possible to attempt to secure the release of the four Jordanians before their execution, but according to Rashid, "the Iraqi authorities did not cooperate and turned a deaf ear."

The King's attack on Iraq inflamed anti-Iraqi feelings in Amman, coming as they did only hours after state television had shown footage of the funeral of two of the executed Jordanian citizens. A representative of King Hussein headed the cortege in an emotionally-charged ceremony last Friday.

Hundreds of angry Jordanians screamed and cursed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as the coffins of Rizk Bisharah and Walid Nusirat left the church, to be carried to separate cemeteries.

The two other Jordanians who were executed, brothers Saad and Saleh Al-Dawaji, were buried in Baghdad because their wives and children live there.

Last week's executions prompted the Jordanian government to order the expulsion of seven Iraqi diplomats and to recall to Amman Adel Suweidan, Jordan's chargé d'affaires in Baghdad, for consultations.

Amman has not named an ambassador to Baghdad since August and the embassy was being run by the chargé d'affaires with a team of six diplomats.

Officials and diplomats said the executions were a *setback following re*cent signs of improvement in bilateral ties, which had hit an all-time low after King Hussein agreed to grant asylum to top Iraqi defectors in 1995 and began calling for democratic reform in Baghdad.

In the streets of Amman, ordinary Jordanians expressed shock, dismay and anger at the killings which they said contrasted with the status of over 40,000 Iraqis officially living and working in the kingdom who are being treated well. *Jordanian sources es*timate that the true number of Iraqis living in Jordan, registered and unregistered, exceeds 200,000.

News of the execution sparked an outcry in the newly-elected parliament and the senate. Both houses issued tough statements condemning the Iraqi move. The deputies called on the Iraqi *government to release immediately all* Jordanian prisoners held there. Some deputies even asked the government to ban the travel of Jordanians to Iraq.

Their call rekindled bitter memories of the late 1970s when Jordan barred all its citizens from going to Iraq and downgraded diplomatic representation after the Iraqi authorities executed a Jordanian student who had been accused of working for the Jordanian security services.

However, relations gradually improved after King Hussein sided with Iraq in its 1980-88 war with Iran, and reached their high-point in 1990 when Amman was one of the few supporters of *Saddam after his invasion of Ku*wait.

Sultan Hattab, a leading columnist for Amman's widely-read *Al-Rai'* daily said that Americans and other nationals who had been captured by the Iraqis and accused of spying, or who were picked up when their planes were downed during the war, had all been released, whereas Arab nationals were executed without mercy. "It is shocking to see the Iraqis treating citizens coming from Jordan, a friendly Arab country, in this shameful manner," Hattab wrote in his column earlier this week.

Bekaa withdrawal symptoms

Residents of the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon are threatening to resort to planting drugs again if the government continues to disregard their social and economic needs. **Zeina Khodr** visited the cash-strapped valley

During the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), the Bekaa Valley in the north-east of the country was famous for the quality of the hashish and opium it produced, and the area was widely regarded as the drugs capital of the Middle East.

In 1992, the area was declared drug-free by the United Nations. But today valley farmers are threatening that they may be forced to replant drug crops because of the severe economic hardship they are suffering.

The drug trade flourished in the plains of the Bekaa in the absence of government authority during the war years, generating over $80 million revenue annually. Around 50,000 families relied on the trade for their livelihood. Farmers were forced out of work in 1992 when the government, assisted by Syrian troops, clamped down on the illicit industry.

These efforts have now borne fruit. In November this year, US President Bill Clinton decided *to remove Lebanon and Syria from* the annual list of major drug trafficking countries. "I have removed both countries from the list this year and have placed them on the watch list, with the understanding that they will be once again listed as major illicit drug *producers or transit* countries should the evidence warrant," Clinton said.

The move, which angered many members of the US Congress, was a dramatic reversal of the decision last March when Lebanon was named as one of three countries *described* as major drug producers or traffickers.

Lebanese officials welcomed the decision and said it was warranted in the light of the government's drug eradication programme.

A Lebanese analyst, Michael Young, said he was not surprised by the move. "This could be part of the process of normalisation between Beirut and Washington that began when US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright lifted the travel ban on Lebanon last July prior to her visit to Beirut in September," he said.

But the drug clampdown has plunged the already impoverished Bekaa Valley deeper into crisis. It was not until 1994 that the plight of the farmers was acknowledged. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) finally stepped in to assist in reorienting agricultural production in the area.

The UN has promised over *$100* million in aid as part of a development programme following the end of drug cultivation. But according to the head of the UN Rural Integrated Development Programme for the Baalbak-Hermel area, Mohamed Al-Ferjani, the funds *have not* been *forthcoming*. "We are cash strapped. We are waiting for donor nations to provide the needed funds," Ferjani told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The international community did not respond as positively as expected. The UNDP programme was grant*ed $4.2 million for the first stage of development in 1994 and re*ceived another $1.2 million for the second stage. But these funds are inadequate in the light of the area's needs, which amount to $122 million. The region needs irrigation projects, a social development plan and another to create opportunities for processing agricultural products."

The UNDP was not alone in calling for funds. In a report prepared in 1994, the International Narcotics Control Board stated that: "The Board highly appreciates the successful eradication campaign which put an end to the illicit cultivation of cannabis and opium poppy in the Bekaa... In order to maintain the momentum, assistance should continue to be provided to the growers. The Board appeals to the international community for help."

But instead of 'manna from on high' fertilising the area's renewal, lack of promised funds has helped entrench a culture of poverty and deprivation. Farmers complain that the government has not offered them viable alternative crops. They believe the situation cannot continue as it is for much longer. "What do they want us to do now without any help? Our living conditions have deteriorated," Nabil Kayrouz, a farmer in the village of Deir Ahmar told the *Weekly*. " Do you think the people here enjoyed the drug reputation we had? We had no other choice at the time, and without assistance drugs could become a common sight again."

But Ferjani, who sympathises with the farmers' dire conditions, nevertheless dismisses their threats that they will turn back to drugs. "I do not think they will be able to grow illicit crops again because of the presence of the government and Syrian troops in the area," he said.

Lebanese Interior Minister Michel El-Murr blamed the lack of international funds for helping to spread poverty and fuel the so-called "Hunger Revolution," a civil disobedience movement being *led by a former Hizbollah leader in the Bekaa Valley.*

"Lebanon has fulfilled its promise and eradicated drug production, thus depriving these people of a major source of income, but the UN and the big countries have not kept their promise to fund an alternative *crop programme. Therefore, it is inevitable that* poverty has increased and resentment against the state has spread," Murr said.

Sheikh Sobhi Tufayli, leader of a breakaway faction of Hizbollah, launched a civil *disobedience campaign against* the government in July, organising street protests and barring ministers and deputies from entering the Bekaa region. But he recently suspended his "revolution" after the government earmarked funds for development projects in the area. Tufayli, however, *has threatened* to relaunch his campaign if the socio-economic conditions in the area do not improve. If he does so, then maybe hemp and poppies too will soon be growing again in the Bekaa Valley.

Americans divided over 'thoughtful dialogue'

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's call for "thoughtful dialogue with the American people" was given a cautious welcome this week in Washington, **Thomas Gorguissian** reports

President Bill Clinton said on Monday he was "quite encouraged" by the statement made over the weekend by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami calling for "thoughtful dialogue with the American people".

Khatami told reporters at a news conference: "I declare my respect for the great people of the United States, and I hope that in the close future, I will be able to enter into dialogue with the people of America, and that this will happen soon."

President Clinton, during a photo session with visiting Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern earlier this week, responded: "I would like nothing better than to have a dialogue with Iran, as long as we can have an honest discussion of all the relevant issues. We remain concerned about the sponsorship of terrorism, about the violent attacks on the peace process, and about their acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. And we will continue to be concerned about those things."

Similar concerns were also expressed at the State Department's daily briefing *on Monday* where, once again, a very cautious welcome was expressed in response to Iran's conciliatory remarks.

According to US officials, nothing will change soon in American-Iranian relations, but the call from Tehran is certainly an "ice breaker" in the chilly relations that have held sway between the two countries over the past 20 years.

The American administration, represented by Karl F. Indefurth, assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs, has for several months been holding meetings at the United Nations with Iran as one of a small group of interested nations in the attempt to resolve conflicts between the warring factions in Afghanistan. Some reports described these discussions, which began last May, as "secret talks". At the State Department, spokesman James Foley denied these reports, but acknowledged that on at *least three occasions since late summer, repre*sentatives from both countries were engaged in multilateral discussions at the UN on Afghanistan. Foley stressed that the United States and Iran were among eight countries involved in these talks which were held under the auspices of the UN.

Khatami's comments, according to observers in Washington, will intensify the ongoing debate on whether Washington should punish its European allies for signing huge trade deals with Iran.

According to a *New York Times* report, the White House recently held several meetings attended by the administration's top national security advisers to discuss this issue, but "they have failed to reach a decision". The US recently threatened to impose sanctions on companies in France, Russia, Malaysia and Canada that have signed natural gas deals with Iran.

A week ago, the anger of AIPAC (American-*Israel Public Affairs Committee) at a possible* nod from the White House to deal between the French petrochemicals company, Total, with Tehran was reflected in a front-page story in the Jewish newspaper *Forward*, published in New York.

The story says that President Clinton "is on the verge of allowing a $2 billion gas deal between France and Iran to go through — a move that pro-Israel advocates are warning will help the Islamic Republic pay for missiles and nuclear bombs to use against the Jewish State." The *Forward* story also mentioned a split among the president's advisers. It said that the under-secretary of state, Stuart Eizenstat, and deputy secretary of state, Strobe Talbott, were against the sanctions, while the National Security Council's *senior director for Near East Af*fairs, Bruce Riedel, was in favour of a "tougher stance".

The New York Times on Tuesday also referred to this split. It added the name of Thomas Pickering (the under-secretary of state for political affairs) to the list of opponents of the sanctions, while Leon Fuerth, Vice President Al Gore's national security adviser, is reportedly in favour. Meanwhile, Sandy Berger, the president's national security adviser, is described as acting as "referee" at the UN meetings. Yet in the midst of all this cataloguing of differences, Secretary of *State Madeleine Alb*right's name has still not been mentioned at all.

Political observers and lobbyists expect a storm of criticism from AIPAC and major Jewish organisations warning against any rapprochement or any kind of dialogue with the Islamic Republic.

A strong protest is also expected from the Republican-dominated Congress. More than 100 members of Congress have written to President Clinton asking him to impose sanctions against Tehran.

The Iranian call for "thoughtful dialogue" may not lead directly to a policy change in Washington, but, as one senior administration official said, President Clinton's recent remarks on the matter "were intended to send a positive response to Khatami." But a positive response is not to be expected from the American press, which is expected to continue focusing on internal struggles in Iran over relations with the US, *to prove that* nothing is really changing.

But the real issue at stake here goes deeper than public relations. The US policy of "dual containment" of Iran and Iraq designed by now US *Assistant* Secretary of State Martin Indyk has proved to be a failure, mainly because it has not been able to bring political stability to the region. Some change of tack is clearly necessary. *Khatami's* call for dialogue provides an opportunity for the Americans to do just that.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**





The Paris trial of 'Carlos', this week, reviewed some of his most daring feats. One of the most elusive fugitives in modern history, the 48-year-old Venezuelan-born Ilich Ramirez Sanchez is accused of the 1975 killing in a Paris Left Bank apartment of two French intelligence agents, Raymond Dous and Jean Donatini and a Lebanese police informer, Michel Moukharbal. But the defense contends the agents were actually killed in a plot by the Israeli Mossad and the CIA. The French agents were investigating Carlos' role in several attacks on Israel's El Al airlines at Paris Orly Airport. Carlos also carried out the 1975 seizure of OPEC oil ministers and was involved in the 1976 Palestinian hijacking of a French jetliner to Entebbe, Uganda.
(photo: AFP)

Judgement day in Philadelphia

Poll-driven executions of the poor and black in the US have outraged international observers, writes **Gamal Nkrumah** in Philadelphia

Last week, 25 human rights activists and legal experts from around the world met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for the convening of the People's International Tribunal for Justice for Mumia Abu-Jamal, an award-winning radio and investigative journalist sentenced to death because of his alleged killing of a police officer in 1981. Prior to his arrest, Abu-Jamal was considered a community leader and people's advocate among the poor and black in the urban slums of Philadelphia. He has since authored two books written on death row. The People's International Tribunal was convened to hear evidence supporting charges brought against a number of defendants including the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Thomas Ridge, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, the Fraternal Order of Police, the Police Department of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell, and former Judge of Philadelphia's Court of Common Pleas Albert Sabo, who had long dismissed evidence supporting Abu-Jamal's innocence and was hurriedly retired due to mounting international pressure for the re-trial of America's most celebrated political prisoner.

In 1995, Abu-Jamal appealed for a new trial. But it appears that the powers that be are determined to see him silenced forever. "Political prisoners never have their appeals overturned," warned Michael Tarik Warren, a New York lawyer who served as chief prosecutor at the People's International Tribunal. Abu-Jamal is believed to be on death row not only because he is poor and black, but because he is an articulate community leader and people's advocate. Prior to his conviction and incarceration, Abu-Jamal was a member of the Black Panthers, a militant African American organisation that upheld the right of self-defence against police brutality.

The United States has the highest imprisonment rate in the world. One out of every 163 Americans is in prison, but the vast majority of those in prison are poor and black. There is a ground swell of international outrage at the fact that while America continues to preach about the upholding of human rights and democratisation abroad, especially in the Third World, its own record of human rights violations at home is considered disgraceful. More people are on death row than ever before, and with fewer cases being overturned in recent years, many international observers fear that in the current political climate, those sentenced to death will be almost exclusively poor and black men.

It was in this charged atmosphere that the People's International Tribunal took place last week. The defendants have an abysmal record of human rights violations. Judge Sabo, known as the king of death row, presided over homicide cases, including Abu-Jamal's. In his quarter of a century on the bench, 31 defendants, mainly black, left his court with death sentences. Pennsylvania has the fourth largest death row population in the US, and a record number of executions are expected in Pennsylvania in 1998. Poll-driven executions are a critically important factor in conservative rural Pennsylvania. Only about 10 per cent of the state's population is black, geographically concentrated in large urban centres like Philadelphia, but over 60 per cent of the 300 people on death row are black. Ethnic and racial minorities make up 90 per cent of the prisoners that have been sentenced to death in Philadelphia, or 103 out of a total of 115.

"Philadelphia's death penalty is largely implemented by white people against black people. It cannot be fair that minorities are both subjected to the death penalty in such high numbers and systematically removed from participating in the judicial process," warned Pierre Sane, Amnesty International's secretary-general after a visit to Philadelphia. Sane visited death row inmates Abu-Jamal and Scott Blystone, a mentally handicapped black man. Sane said that the case of Blystone "shows how the rights of the poor are trampled on by the system. While the district attorney assigns their brightest, most experienced staff to criminal cases, the indigent often end up with under-experienced, under-paid counsel."

Sane expressed concern over the hatred of law enforcement officers, both the judiciary and the police, for Abu-Jamal. "Pennsylvania's death sentencing is one of the most racist and unfair in the US. Philadelphia's record is even worse," he said. "Amnesty International is horrified that nine out of ten people sentenced to die in Philadelphia are African American. Amnesty International is very concerned about the still pervasive practice in Philadelphia of excluding African Americans from juries in capital cases and urges the District Attorney of Philadelphia to put a stop to racial tampering in jury selection. It is callous, immoral and unconstitutional." Sane also warned against the "lack of independent and impartial arbiters in Pennsylvania's appeal court system," which he said might "prevent [Abu-Jamal] from receiving a fair and impartial hearing for the legal claims he has made concerning his original trial."

Ten years ago, Pennsylvania, like a majority of the capital-punishment states, instituted the lethal injection method of execution. The lethal injection has been defended as humane and painless by the apologists of capital punishment. But the bottom line is that lethal injection is cheaper than the electric chair or any other method of execution.

To date, there have been 73 documented cases in the US of people found innocent and released from death row.

After receiving a day-long compilation of visual, spoken and written testimony, the international judges conducted private deliberations and the defendants were found guilty. The judges' conclusions were summarised in a three-page document that stated that Mumia Abu-Jamal's constitutional and human rights were grossly violated. "His unjust conviction, unlawful incarceration and illegal death sentence," were condemned and found to be contravening the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1965 International Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and the 1966 Convention on Civil and Political Rights, all of which the US has ratified. Two of the judges presented their findings to the representative of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in New York on International Human Rights Day.

'Worse than the Belgrano'

Nelson Mandela's initiative has given hope to the families of the victims of the airplane bombing over Lockerbie, but, writes **Gavin Bowd** from Edinburgh, the Blair government's ear is turned solidly towards Washington

During the recent Commonwealth Summit in Edinburgh, Scotland, in October, Nelson Mandela embarrassed the British government by calling for a trial at a neutral venue for the two Libyans accused of the bombing in December 1988 of a PanAm flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, resulting in the killing of 270 people. The British and American governments have adamantly refused to make this concession.

Mandela has always taken a keen interest in the Lockerbie affair. His only communication with former Prime Minister John Major was on that subject. And at his first meeting with Tony Blair, 40 minutes were devoted to the Lockerbie affair. For Mandela, a fair trial for the Libyan suspects is impossible because a British court would be simultaneously the 'complainant, prosecutor and judge'. The pre-trial publicity surrounding the case would also make any jury prejudiced against the accused.

A solution along the lines proposed by the President of South Africa has already been formulated by Professor Robert Black, specialist of Scots Law at the University of Edinburgh. Black proposes an amendment to the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act which would permit a trial in a third country before a panel of Scottish judges rather than a jury. According to Black, such an amendment could be pushed through in days if the political will was there. This would quickly open the way to a trial, as the Libyan government and lawyers for the accused agreed to this solution as far back as January 1994.

Mandela's intervention received widespread support in the Scottish press. *The Scotsman* commented: "Even the most scrupulous of Scottish jurors would find it hard to clear their minds of all they have read and heard in almost nine years." British and American opposition to a trial without jury was hypocritical given the fact that 'special circumstances' have justified just such a system for the Bosnian War Crimes Tribunal.

In the House of Commons, the campaign for a trial to take place on neutral territory has been taken up by the Scottish Labour MP, Tam Dalyell. Dalyell is known as a dogged, if eccentric campaigner. He may recently have failed in his idiosyncratic opposition to Scottish devolution. However, he scored a significant victory over Margaret Thatcher when he forced her to admit that she had ordered the sinking of the Argentinian ship, the Belgrano, outside the 'total exclusion zone' during 1982's Falklands War. Dalyell has now devoted his tenacious campaigning skills to Lockerbie.

At a recent debate in the Commons, Dalyell made a point-by-point rebuttal of the government's opposition to a future trial taking place at a neutral venue. "Are the government saying," he asked, "that the location of the trial in Scotland is more important than the trial itself? If so, they have a woefully distorted set of priorities."

For Dalyell, media coverage of the Lockerbie issue, and the harassment of the Libyan suspects, have made a fair trial impossible. Dalyell did not hesitate to compare this situation with the media hysteria surrounding the recent trial of the English au pair Louise Woodward, in the US. British and American obstinacy had only produced "nine long years that have been harrowing to the relatives and extremely detrimental to our relations not only with the Arab world, but with the Organisation of African Unity and to British industry," he argued.

For Dalyell, a fair and transparent trial is necessary to dispel the mystery surrounding the involvement of US and British intelligence services. The question needs to be answered as to why the authorities have denied the existence of an unmarked white helicopter despite numerous reported sightings of it over the area where PanAm flight 103 came crashing down. These reported sightings were in the first hours and days after the Lockerbie bombing and it is believed that armed crew members warned even the search and rescue personnel to leave certain areas. There also remains the mystery of a suitcase which was removed from the scene by US personnel then returned empty to the Scottish police. The evidence against the Libyans is further compromised by the fact that the American forensics expert concerned, James T. Thurman, has since been sacked for negligence.

The British government refused to accept Dalyell's arguments. Its position is that Libya must abide by UN Security Council resolutions and hand the two suspects over for trial either in Scotland or the USA. For the government, the amendment proposed by Professor Black would create a 'mongrel system' that would undermine the integrity of the Scottish criminal justice system forever. As a small concession, the government intends to invite the Organisation of African Unity and the Arab League to study legal procedures and observe the trial.

During the thirteenth Commons debate on the subject Tam Dalyell exclaimed: "This is a situation without an end in sight. There is no light at the end of the tunnel. Are we to go on and on with such relations with one of the states of North Africa that is not overcome by the Islamic problems that afflict Algeria? Is there any hope of getting them on a correct basis?"

Dalyell links the Lockerbie issue to the wider Middle East policy of the new Labour government: "I take a very different view from Robin Cook and Tony Blair — I don't think that they understand the Arab world. I don't resort to abusive words like stooges but I am appalled that we are so unquestioning of the Americans," Dalyell remarked in statements to *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Blair has inherited from Major a mixture of intransigence and subservience which has also recently been displayed in relation to Saddam Hussein, said Dalyell, adding: "I think sanctions should be lifted against Iraq."

Mandela's intervention has nevertheless been a fillip for the Lockerbie victims' families campaigning for a trial to be held at a neutral venue. Their representative is Jim Swire, whose daughter, Flora, was killed in the disaster. In his long campaign for justice, Swire and his supporters have faced various obstacles: infiltration by British intelligence; American relatives content with substantial damages paid by PanAm Airlines; and British civil servants who have been decorated by the American authorities for their handling of the Lockerbie affair.

Swire does, however, believe that Mandela has brought the Lockerbie issue back to the fore. They are pinning some of their hopes on a judgment in December by the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The judges are to decide if Security Council resolutions can be overridden by the Montreal Convention of 1971. If this is the case, then according to the Treaty, a trial could take place in Libya or in the countries of origin of the victims.

Swire and his supporters are also launching a Scottish petition in favour of a neutral venue. They hope to gather a million signatures and put intolerable pressure on the government.

For Swire, the Hague decision will be of crucial global importance. He told the *Weekly*, "The judgment will tell us whether international justice should be in the hands of judges or in the hands of a pack of politicians with a veto that excludes smaller nations."

The Lockerbie affair has other important implications for international justice. "Especially in this decade, we have seen the modern media and its influence create a new situation where often the jury system is inappropriate. Ever since the Nuremberg trials, there has been talk of creating a permanent international criminal court, but such a body has never come into being because of national pride. Lockerbie will show how important a truly effective international justice system could be," Dalyell added.

It is indeed national pride, believes Swire, which motivates the British and American governments' refusal to back down. They do not want to be seen to bow to a 'terrorist' state like Libya: they also do not want to bring to trial a case that would be 'laughed out of court.'

Swire is deeply sceptical of Libyan involvement in the Lockerbie disaster. He points out that Margaret Thatcher, in her memoirs, *The Downing Street Years*, refers approvingly to the American air strikes against Tripoli in 1986: "The attack made the world a safer place. A Libyan counter-attack was impossible," wrote the Iron Lady. Thatcher forbade any inquiry into the Lockerbie affair, and stood by the thesis that Libya had planted the bomb in retaliation. The fatal explosives would have come from Tripoli via Malta, she held.

Many conspiracy theories, some lurid, some frighteningly plausible, have grown up around the Lockerbie bombing. Dr Swire himself is convinced of the theory that the outrage was committed by Iranian-backed terrorists. This is based on a confession to German police by a former Iranian intelligence officer, Mesbahi.

According to this version of events, the bomb was planted by terrorists under the command of Abu Nidal. The bomb was transported directly to Heathrow Airport, and not via Malta. It was placed in a baggage container which was left open for one hour. The Iranian Airline office happened to be next door. Having lost an airliner just previously, Iran had a motive for the attack. With the subsequent shifting of alliances in the region, Britain and America had reason to cover up Iran's involvement.

The Lockerbie affair is, according to Jim Swire, "worse than the Belgrano," since in the case of Lockerbie, it is the fate of Western civilians "that these governments want to cover up."

Rewards for the culprits?

While conflicting rumours circulate once more about the Russian President's health, **Abdel-Malek Khalil** in Moscow examines some of the even bigger headaches awaiting Yeltsin should he ever recover

Struggling with his latest bout of ill health, Russian President Boris Yeltsin told journalists on Sunday that he felt weak and exhausted, but that his doctors had assured him his condition would improve within 10 days time. Recuperating at the exclusive Barvikha government clinic outsided of Moscow, the 66-year-old Russian leader joked with the press, saying that his "viral infection" proved that he had been up and about and communicating with the people. Yeltsin also assured the press that he was in control, despite his illness, working an average of four hours a day on large stacks of documents that his staff brought him each morning.

An ailing Yeltsin was hospitalised last Wednesday among conflicting reports about his condition. "Boris Yeltsin had a severe spasm of the blood vessels in the brain, linked to sharp weather fluctuations and his general tiredness and overwork," Radio Moscow Echo said Friday, quoting "reliable medical sources". Western medical experts said that a spasm of the brain blood vessels was a serious medical condition and could cause haemorrhaging of the brain-lining and restrict blood supplies to the brain.

The Kremlin, however, quickly dismissed the report, saying that Yeltsin was only suffering from an acute respiratory viral infection resulting from a cold. And the president's heart surgeon, Dr. Renat Akchurin, categorically denied that Yeltsin's current illness was in any way related to last year's quintuple bypass surgery.

Washington likewise denied "rumours" that Yeltsin was seriously ill, backing the Kremlin's statement. "We have seen the statements made by the Russian government and by the president's spokesman... and are not aware of anything that leads us to believe that they are incorrect," stressed White House spokesman Michael McCurry.

Despite the Kremlin's official version of Yeltsin's condition, many analysts remain sceptical, remembering last summer's announcement on the eve of the presidential election that Yelsin had been hospitalised with a cold and a sore throat — when he had in reality suffered a massive heart attack.

According to Dmitri Trenin, an analyst with the Moscow branch of the Carnegie Endowment, a prolonged Yeltsin absence would induce establishment presidential hopefuls to form alliances in order to keep powerful opposition figures like Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov or political mavericks like former Kremlin security chief Alexander Lebed and Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov away from the centres of power.

The Russian President's ill health comes at an inopportune time, when most analysts agree that the country's economy is ailing as much as its president. Although First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais said on Monday that Russia had weathered the storm in the financial markets because the government no longer needed new foreign loans to balance its budget, observers remain sceptical. Despite Chubais' assurances to the contrary, the Yeltsin administration is banking on a delayed loan installment from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to meet its commitments and pay off US$4.4 billion in delayed public sector pension and wage payments — which have become virtually a permanent feature of Russian life. In addition, Russian stocks are depressed because of high interest rates and the rouble's weakness against the dollar — threatening devaluation, which the government is attempting to pass off as a "redenomination" of the currency. In an effort to meet IMF fiscal austerity demands and balance the budget, Yeltsin had called for a US$6.7 billion state spending cut, to be achieved by further slashing government jobs. In addition to balancing the budget, Yeltsin's proposal will help boost the country's rampant unemployment levels that reached 10 per cent last year.

Moreover, rumours of rampant corruption, financial mismanagement and embezzlement have tarnished the image of several prominent establishment politicians. Although Anatoly Chubais was involved in a high-profile book royalty scandal last month and consequently lost the finance ministry portfolio, he was kept on as a First Deputy Prime Minister and is still in charge of the economy.

Denouncing the administration's failure to control financial corruption and improve the material living conditions of ordinary Russians, maverick former general Lev Rokhlin — who heads the Lower House of Parliament's Defence Committee — called for the creation of a special committee to impeach Yeltsin. Said Rokhlin: "[with this government] the country is falling apart, while the culprits are being rewarded."

Bonds issue

THE MIDDLE East Modern Lighting Company last week launched an LE15 million bond offering for public subscription, making it the third private Egyptian company with corporate bonds traded on the Egyptian stock market.

Another LE39 million of the company's bonds already had been issued through the National Bank of Egypt, the Suez Canal Bank and the Anglo-Egyptian Financial Investments Company.

The bond maturity is seven years, and subscribers will have a bond yield of 11 per cent, distributed biannually. The bonds are negotiable, and cannot be transformed into shares.

Tarek El-Gammal, a corporate finance analyst, pointed out that the aim of the bond issue is the financial restructuring of the company to maximise profits.

According to El-Gammal, the cost of using bonds as a financing source is lower than borrowing from banks.

The company, established in 1992, had a tax holiday of five years. Its projected profits for fiscal year 1997 is LE9.3 million compared to LE1.7 million for fiscal year 1996.

Alcatel contract

EGYPT Telecom, the national telecommunications organisation slated for partial privatisation, has signed a contract with the French telecommunications giant, Alcatel, for the establishment and installation of 800,000 new lines.

The FF250 million contract — part of Egypt's bid to double its phone line network over the next five years — will enable the country to raise the number of telephone lines to 10 million by the year 2002.

Alcatel, which has been operating in Egypt for 20 years, has already installed 1,350,000 lines under previous contracts.

WTO agreement

ALONG with the other members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Egypt last week signed an agreement for the liberalisation of the global financial industry.

The agreement aims at lifting national barriers in the banking, insurance and fund management industries.

Financial analysts believe that once implemented, the agreement will strengthen the financial infrastructure, thereby benefiting all other trading sectors.

Egypt's Minister of Supply and Trade, Ahmed Guweili, said that Egypt is ready for this agreement, having participated in its negotiations over the last two years.

According to Guweili, Egypt joined in the agreement because of its efforts to open the door for foreign companies and banks to operate in the country. It has also lifted the 49 per cent ceiling for foreign ownership in joint-venture banks.

Other reforms that have paved the way for Egypt to play a role in the international financial community include amendments made to the legislative structure of the banking, insurance and fund management businesses.

But other Egyptian officials were less optimistic about the agreement. Mounir Zahran, Egypt's ambassador to the WTO, was sceptical that the agreement would benefit developing countries.

Zahran was quoted by Reuters as saying that the agreement essentially endorsed a one-way street allowing multinational corporations to usurp more power.

Emerging economies, however, have little choice but to accept the agreement, he said, because they are in need of investments and financing for their trade operations.

As the new parliamentary session gets under way, the government pushes ahead with new legal and administrative reforms aimed at reinforcing Egypt's new investment policies

Parliament tackles key laws

The People's Assembly started last week laying the legal foundation for the government's new investor-friendly policies. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

If Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri has his way over the next couple of months, it will be a busy season for the country's legislators.

El-Ganzouri is scheduled to deliver his government's annual policy statement in front of the People's Assembly next Saturday. The policy package, as he outlined it during a recent meeting with the leaders of Egypt's political parties, includes at least 36 socio-economic draft laws that the government would like to see passed by the PA the coming year.

Twelve of these draft laws target encouraging investment – a cornerstone of the government's bid to reform the economy. Of these 12, the parliament last week began grappling with four and, to no one's surprise, sparks flew as leftist MPs voiced concerns over how these bills would affect Egypt's lower income groups.

The first bill, which exempts civilian airplanes, their spare parts, components and services from a 10 per cent sales tax, is described by the government as offering Egypt a more competitive edge in international markets, by reducing the cost of air freight for exports.

But leftist MPs offered a different interpretation of what it would do — benefiting the rich while being of no use to the poor.

"I don't know what this bill's impact on the poor....will be," said Mohamed El-Doheiri, a die-hard leftist MP. The poor "know almost nothing about these airplanes, and do not consume the products and goods they transport."

Zakaria Azmi, President Mubarak's chief of staff, said that the government was not providing "transparent facts or figures" about these bills.

"Would the finance minister tell us what the exact value of this exemption (would be)?" he queried. "Are these air transport companies poor...and do they really deserve such exemptions?"

"There are rumours that these types of laws will directly serve the interests of a limited number of businessmen," he continued, voicing similar concerns to those of El-Doheiri.

"This is why we need more transparent information about this law in terms of figures and facts," he said.

Mohamed Marzouk, an independent MP from the city of Kafr El-Dawar, urged the government to explain to the PA what businessmen *and investors have offered in return* for other investor-friendly laws passed before.

The criticisms did not sit well with Finance Minister Mohieddin El-Gharib, who denied that these draft laws will be of benefit to a limited number of investors.

"These draft laws are the product of several meetings headed by President Mubarak in his capacity as chairman of the Supreme Export Council," said El-Gharib.

"He urged the government to probe new ways of reducing transport costs of Egyptian exports and for raising the capacity of Egypt's air fleet," said the finance minister.

Also on the list of draft laws submitted to the PA was an amendment to the Customs Law of 1963. The amendment establishes and drawback system which allows exporters to automatically retrieve fees, customs taxes and financial guarantees paid on imports of raw materials as soon as they are re-exported or sold locally to agencies entitled to a full or partial exemption from such fees and taxes (such as oil companies).

The amendment, however, came under fire from some MPs. Badri Farghali, a leftist, and businessman Abdel-Wahab Qouta, both of whom represent Port Said, argued that the amendment will harm industries.

El-Gharib defended the amendment, saying that the government will take steps to ensure that such exemptions will not be abused by exporters.

The third draft law debated by parliament *provides an exemption from taxes levied on* real estate revenues and profits of money investment companies to growers of flowers and nursery owners.

The draft law aims at boosting exports of flowers used for home decoration and medical purposes.

Unlike the other draft laws, this one was discussed only in the PA's Budget Committee, and MPs insisted that Agriculture Minister Youssef Wali deliver a statement about the benefit such exemptions would have on agricultural exports. The bill, therefore, was referred to the Assembly's Agricultural Committee for further review.

The fourth law being debated seeks to settle disputes *between the* Tax Authority and taxpayers. The law will help settle more than 250,000 tax cases pending before Egyptian courts.

To ensure compliance, the law provides for the formation of tax reconciliation committees *responsible for settling* current disputes between the Tax Authority and the taxpayers.

Leftist MPs again raised concerns that the proposed reconciliation favours "businessmen, artists and belly dancers" who often sue the Tax Authority *as a means* of avoiding paying the required taxes.

Topping the list of the remaining bills before parliament, which are aimed at promoting an investor-friendly economic environment in Egypt, is an amendment to the Regulations of the Bidding Procedures Law no. 9 of 1983. The amendment seeks to eliminate a host of procedures currently impeding national project bidding efforts by public sector agencies and private entrepreneurs.

Designed to supplement this amendment is the Unified Companies Bill, a draft law aimed at unifying one law all previous laws governing the establishment of companies.

Another part of the policy package is a landmark piece of legislation that will convert Egypt's telecommunications authority, ARENTO, into a joint venture company that will be privatised on the *stock market.*

Telecommunications to go private

Egypt's telecommunications industry, long deemed untouchable, is next for privatisation, said the country's cabinet. **Niveen Wahish** reports

The pace of privatisation sometimes exceeds even the expectation of Public Sector Minister Atef Ebied. In the past, he stated that Egypt would not privatise any part of its telecommunications network.

But Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri in a cabinet meeting last week turned the tables, saying that not only would the telecommunications business be open to the private sector, but that a majority stake of the national telecommunications organisation, ARENTO, would be sold off.

Under El-Ganzouri's decision, ARENTO would be transformed into a joint-venture company, making it possible to place a percentage of its shares for public subscription once its assets are valued.

In a related move, the cabinet also approved *the transformation of the Egyptian Company* for Telecommunications Equipment into a joint-venture company affiliated with the Holding Company for Engineering Industries. This partnership, however, would be a temporary measure until the procedures for the privatisation of the company are in place and its shares offered for public subscription.

Other privatisations to take place include that of the Egyptian Mobile Telephone Company. This move will go hand-in-hand with the government's recent announcement that it will accept bids for the licensing of another mobile phone carrier to compete with Egyptian Mobile.

Industry insiders have, on the whole, lauded these recent steps, but said that they are late in coming.

Liberalising this sector is an important step, said Othman Lotfy, former chairman of ARENTO, which is also known as Egypt Telecom.

"But we should back this move up with a new telecommunications law which sets a framework for the establishment of a regulatory board that will oversee the performance of this sector and correct the market mechanisms," said Lotfy, a long-time proponent of privatising the country's telecommunications industry.

The actual sale of these companies, however, will take some time, as the companies must still be valued.

"We cannot just depend on the book value," he said.

The cabinet meeting also produced a number of other decisions, among which was unifying the price of natural gas at 14.1 piastres per cubic metre. The government — in trying to encourage investment in large-scale industries that rely on petrochemical products such as iron, steel and cement — also expressed its commitment to not raising the price of natural gas by more than 25 per cent over the next eight years.

The cabinet also agreed to hand over the build, operate, transfer (BOT) Mersa Allam airport project to the Kuwaiti Investment Group, which had submitted a winning bid. The project's commitment period is 40 years, at the end of which, its ownership will revert to the government unless the contract is renewed.

The KIG will also gradually inject investments into the area surrounding the airport, bringing the total cost of the project to roughly LE120 million.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



A poem condoning the assassination by an Indian student of a leading British colonial official in the early years of the 20th century sparked off a court case in which the freedom of opinion and expression was the core issue. Like India, Egypt then was under British occupation and the court case brought by the government against the poet and suspected accomplices was obviously inspired, if not ordered, by the British. The poet, Sheikh Ali El-Ghayati, who fled to Istanbul before the hearings began, *was sentenced in absentia to six months* imprisonment with labour. In a subsequent case, nationalist leader Mohamed Farid received a six-month prison term just for having written an introduction to the book containing the offending poem. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story from reports published by *Al-Ahram*



Illustration: Makram Henein

"How can I mourn you, Dangara, with a eulogy that people claim is a crime/
Yesterday you died and your memory will be eternal/
Peace be *upon you, and as our tears* flow a fire blazes in our hearts."

This verse was part of a poem written by Sheikh Ali El-Ghayati in his anthology, *Wataniyyati* (My Patriotism). The anthology touched off one *of the most important* cases *involving* freedom of opinion and expression in Egypt.

Dangara was an Indian studying in England at the beginning of this century. He was sentenced to death there for having assassinated Sir Curzon Willie who had been a prominent British colonial official in India. The sentence was carried out on 17 August 1909.

The Dangara incident captured the imagination of Egyptian nationalists. On the day of Dangara's execution the Egyptian Nationalist Party newspapers glorified the young Indian student. *Al-Liwa* wrote, "Today the rancour against England blazes hotter and stronger in the hearts of the Indian people. Today that people will intensify their struggle for independence. Today the British colonial state will begin to crack up." The author of this article was Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish, who was eventually sentenced to *three months in prison* on account of it.

"Condoning Dangara's crime" was not the only offense involved in what *Al-Ahram* called "the trial of El-Ghayati and his accomplices." Other charges included sedition and slandering the person of the khedive.

In its treatment of this issue, *Al-Ahram* stood apart from its contemporaries. It was not a partisan of any of the defendants such as Gawish, editor-in-chief of *Al-Alam* (The Flag) which became the mouthpiece for the Nationalist Party after *Al-Liwa*, and Mohamed Farid the leader of the Nationalist Party himself. Nor did it share the bias of the pro-occupation *and pro-palace newspapers such as Al-Muqattam* and *Al-Mu'ayyid*. Indeed, *Al-Ahram*'s impartiality attracted the contributions of El-Ghayati himself after he fled to Istanbul. Under the headline, "My migration in defense of my patriotism", *which appeared* in *Al-Ahram* on 26 July 1910, El-Ghayati wrote, "The following article is a brief account of my case which was blown out of proportion by the government in Egypt. I pray that the venerable *Al-Ahram* will print *it in full, and* I shall write from time to time concerning any new developments in my case." It is through the eyes of *Al-Ahram*, therefore, that we will continue to follow "the trial of El-Ghayati and his accomplices."

On 6 July 1910, *Al-Ahram* announced to its readers that El-Ghayati had published a collection of poems which the Ministry of Interior found *seditious and consequently* moved to have it banned from sale and to prosecute the author and all those implicated in the publication and distribution of the book. The latter included Gawish who was interrogated for four hours, Ismail Bek Hafiz the owner of *Al-Alam* and Mohamed Farid Bek, the leader of the Nationalist Party "who will be subjected to questioning upon his return from Europe."

Al-Ahram commented, "All that can be said about this issue at the moment is that the judiciary is giving an unusually high degree of attention to it." *Al-Ahram* put its finger on the crucial issue. The government's objective was to deliver a blow to the nationalist movement and to restrict the freedom of the press. El-Ghayati's poetry was to serve that purpose, even though, as *Al-Ahram* observed, "the poet himself has not made a great impression on the Egyptian people. Very few people have read his works."

As the investigations got under way, police mounted a search for El-Ghayati. Suspicions that he had managed to flee the country were confirmed by a report the poet himself wrote to *Al-Ahram* from Istanbul.

El-Ghayati made good on his intent to remain abroad for five years, "the period necessary for the validity of any sentence passed against him to have lapsed." The trial of El-Ghayati and his codefendants began on 5 August. The accused — El-Ghayati, "currently residing in Istanbul"; Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish; Sheikh Mohamed Hassan El-Qazwini and Elias Diab Effendi the Director of Al-Ta'lif Bookstore — found themselves facing six charges. These were incitement to murder, contempt for the government, condoning the crime of Dangara, slandering the khedive, insulting the minister of justice, and insulting the ministry and the courts.

Tawfik Nasim presented the case for the prosecution. While sustaining the charges against El-Ghayati was easy, it was more difficult for him to prove the complicity of Gawish and Mohamed Farid who was not named among the accused, but who nevertheless wrote an introduction to the anthology.

The defence attempted to submit into evidence a letter sent by El-Ghayati and published in *Al-Ahram*, exonerating "my two venerable mentors," as he put it. He wrote, "God knows that they cannot be held responsible for any of the book's contents. All they had seen beforehand was a small sample of my work which I had previously published in the Nationalist Party newspapers. Based on this alone, Mohamed Farid gave me a draft of his introduction, after which he travelled to Europe. Up to the present he has not seen a copy of my book and knows nothing of it other than he has been faced with charges because of it. I also have no doubt that Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish, had his attention not been so suddenly brought to the book by the charges he faces, he would not have read so much as a page of it, because he has so little time at his disposal due to his hectic work in the service of the nation."

Four lawyers represented the defence. Mohamed Ali Bek, representing Gawish, attempted to prove that his client had not seen the book before it was published and that El-Ghayati had altered the text in the course of publication. Ahmed Lutfi Bek attempted to dismiss the case on technical grounds, arguing that the prosecution's charges were ambiguous and unsubstantiated. Wahib Dos Effendi and Mohamed Abu Shadi Bek, who were defending Elias Diab and Sheikh El-Qazwini, not only attempted to exonerate their clients but also sought to argue that the poetry in question could be subject to a different interpretation from that proffered by the prosecution.

The court pronounced its ruling the same day. After three hours of deliberation, Mohamed Magdi Bek, the chief magistrate, announced the verdict: "The court has ruled against Sheikh Ali El-Ghayati, in absentia, and Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish, Sheikh Al-Qazwini and Elias Diab Effendi as follows: Sheikh El-Ghayati is sentenced to six months imprisonment with labour and has been acquitted of the charge of incitement to murder. Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish *is sentenced* to three months "light" detention, and Sheikh Mohamed Hassan Al-Qazwini and Elias Diab are sentenced *to two months* detention with a suspension of this sentence as of this moment.

If the public believed that this verdict ended the case, they were soon disillusioned. The authorities were waiting for Mohamed Farid to return from Europe. Unlike El-Ghayati, the Nationalist Party leader had not been tried in absentia, perhaps because the authorities feared that he would remain abroad and out of their reach. Also, they undoubtedly wanted to ascertain what repercussions the ruling against Sheikh Gawish would have among the *public. In this* regard, at least, the authorities were not discouraged. As *Al-Ahram* noted, "writers' pens and people's tongues have fallen silent on this issue and turned to other matters." The government felt confident, therefore, in turning its attention to the leader of the Nationalist Party himself.

Mohamed Farid returned to Egypt at the beginning of 1911 and proceedings against him began on 23 January. Although Farid faced a *new tribunal*, Nasim still acted for the prosecution and the charges brought against him were the same as those brought against the defendants in the August hearings. Farid, a lawyer in his own right, acted as *his own counsel*. In his defence he said, "At the time that anthology was under publication I was abroad. Before I left, the author had asked me to write an introduction. This I did in the manner *of a magazine commentary*, although it contained nothing that can be held against me. If the court perceives otherwise, it is free to do so." According to *Al-Ahram*, the prosecution countered, "It is impossible that you could *comment* on a book without being familiar with its subject matter." Farid responded, "I did not comment on the book per se. Rather my commentary concerned poetry in general, and mention of the book was only incidental."

Nasim, "in his customary eloquence," presented the case of the *prosecution* based on the record of the interrogation conducted with Farid upon his return from Europe. He said, "Farid Bek has admitted that he personally had written the article for which he is being tried and that the *signature it bears* is his own. He also admits to having written it as a favour to El-Ghayati and that he was aware of El-Ghayati's general intent."

According to *Al-Ahram*, Farid made no attempt to refute the prosecution's case. The *newspaper surmised* that the defendant assumed that the verdict was a foregone conclusion and that he did not want to subject himself to further humiliation before the court.

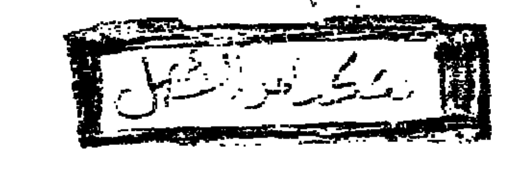
Yet, when the verdict was pronounced, it came as a *shock* to all. The court sentenced Farid to six months of "simple detention," a penalty harsher than that received by Gawish. Justifying its ruling, the court argued, "As the defendant is fully aware of the content of the law and his responsibility under the law, the punishment he receives should be commensurate with the extent of his knowledge."

Once again, *Al-Ahram* saw right to the heart of the issue. It commented, "This is not an ordinary instance of a verdict and a man condemned... If it had been the government's intention to serve justice, it would not have exceeded these bounds and would not have resorted to what the entire public *perceives* as a form of vengeance."

Against the explicit wishes of Farid, *Al-Ahram* as well as partisans of Farid appealed to the khedive to pardon him. "Far be it from His Royal Highness to find it loathsome to have mercy on the *son of* the late Farid Pasha who was one of the most loyal subjects to the Khedival throne," read the appeal of one Nationalist Party leader which was published in *Al-Ahram*. In spite of the appeals, however, the royal pardon was not forthcoming. On 11 March 1911, the Court of Cassation announced that it refused to reverse the ruling of the lower court and Mohamed Farid was forced to serve his sentence behind bars for, among other reasons, having condoned the crime of an Indian student he had never met and whose country he had never visited.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.





A pioneer among investment banks in Egypt

THE START of activities of Misr Iran Development Bank began during the time of the *Infitah* economic policy in Egypt, a policy that formed one of the bases of the Bank's goals, namely, to increase growth of the private sector in economic growth. The better part of the Bank's activities are aimed at investment activities and providing medium and long term financing to private sector projects. It is within this area that the Bank has succeeded in establishing and developing over 200 projects covering a wide range of economic fields including industry and tourism, all with a view to enlarge the role of these sectors with regards to the national economy.

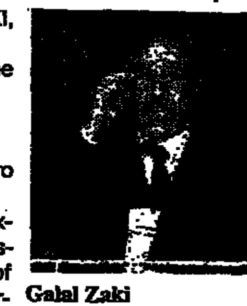
Money & Business

Charting the investment map in Giza

IN AN unprecedented move, Commissioner Maher El-Guindi, governor of Giza, formed an advisory council of businessmen and investors in Giza Governorate during a meeting which was attended by 75 leading buisnessmen headed by Dr Abdel-Moneim Saudi, Mr Shafik Gabr, Dr Adel Hosni, and Eng. Sami Saad.

The council will represent the model of cooperative efforts of the governorate with businessmen in order to rechart the investment map in Giza, especially in light of recent policies designed to revive investment in Egypt. At the same time, the council will be able to chart what services are needed by the people, taking into account local, regional, and international economic changes currently taking place.

IAA Cairo Congress presentation given in the Philippines


Galal Zaki

GALAL ZAKI, Secretary-General of the International Advertising Association (IAA) Cairo Congress, gave an excellent presentation of the conference in the closing session of the AdAsia Conference for the Far East held in the Philippines. The IAA Congress will be held in Cairo next May, under the patronage of President Hosni Mubarak. The closing session of the conference will be headed by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak.

Galal Zaki said the IAA Congress theme will be under the title of "Interaction: The 21st Century", emphasising the development of telecommunications in Egypt and the interaction between Egypt and other countries in the world.

The 36th IAA World Congress is the first to be held in the Middle East and the Arab world. The conference will also be the last of the 20th century. Many prominent Egyptians attended the closing session of the AdAsia Conference in the Philippines, where a presentation on the IAA Cairo Congress was made, and invitations were extended to attendees to visit Egypt.

Egypt's Ambassador in the Philippines, Mr Nabil Zaki, and Chairman of the IAA Congress' Organising Committee, Mr Hassan Hamdi, inspected the Congress' pavilion at the AdAsia Conference.

Minister of economy: Banking sector has an important role in financing large-scale projects

DR YOUSSEF Butros Ghali, minister of finance, affirmed the strength of the Egyptian banking sector and its continued development in wake of international changes, emphasising the sector's ability to participate in financing large-scale national projects. The banking sector, the minister said, has a strong part to play in re-activating and developing the Egyptian money market through establishing new companies and subscribing in their shares. He added that the banks' pivotal role to boost the drive towards development through the application of the most modern techniques in the field has gained favour with international banking community.

Ghali stated that Egyptian financial organisations are considered the most important institutions which can mobilise local supply and incorporate it within the national economy in the form of investments. This can be done by developing its activities to provide modern services at competitive levels of ability, through interest liberalisation, reducing service fees and setting a maximum limit for foreign ownership of joint banks. This is in addition to developing methods of checks and balances compiling financial reports.

Dr Youssef Butros Ghali

The minister of economy said that the success of the financial and banking policies helped Egypt obtain a leading role among countries that are investment attracting. This leading role was only obtained when several international financial firms like Standard and Poor's, Moody's, IBCA, and Merril Lynch decided that Egypt has a good chance among investment attracting markets, especially in light of the Egyptian reform policies which are currently being implemented. There are many reasons why Egypt is capable of being an attractive place for investment, such as the decreasing rate of inflation, the fixed rate of Egyptian currency, the decrease of the national deficit to less than 1 per cent, which is less than the minimum limit of 3 per cent required to be included in the European Union's unit of currency. In addition, Egypt has achieved an increase in its balance of payments and another in its surplus of foreign currency, which has now reached to $21 billion.

The minister of economy added that the Merril Lynch report considers Egypt one of the most promising markets in terms of economic efficiency. The report emphasised the success of the banking and economic policies for economic reform in general.

Ghali said that international financial organisations are monitoring with great interest the positive changes in Egypt's economy. Those changes placed Egypt in fourth place among 32 developing countries with market potential hazards according to a recent report issued by Swiss Credit Bank about the potential risk of developing markets. The report took into consideration the political and exchange rate risks in accordance to 25 ratings in economy, finance, and politics.

NBE enhances existing and new small-scale projects nationwide

IN LINE with its pioneering role in stimulating the Egyptian economy, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has been eager to support the state's policy that aims at increasing the GNP via encouraging youths to establish small-scale projects. In this vein, NBE provides soft-term loans so as to create more job opportunities, either for loan beneficiaries or the staff of the financed projects.

Within this framework, a new contract, the seventh of its kind, has been concluded between NBE and the Social Fund for Development (SFD) with some LE120mn. Such an amount will be lent to the owners of the new and existing small-scale projects all over Egypt according to the following categories:

— The newly graduated who have to appropriate place and expertise to establish and operate the project.

— Craftsmen and technicians who have appropriate place and expertise.

— The unemployed, in general, who have appropriate place and expertise.

— The owners of the existing small-scale projects.

Such loans will be directed towards the following activities:

— Financing the purchase of new machinery.

— Financing the project's spare parts requirements.

— Working capital.

The maximum loan for individual projects amounts to LE50,000 while that of partnership projects is LE200,000 provided that the number of the relevant partners should be four, at least.

Annual simple interest rate on the loans granted for the end beneficiaries is determined at 7 per cent for the new projects and 9 per cent for existing ones.

The repayment period is determined according to both the nature of each project, the period needed for capital turnover and the project's cash flows. The maximum period of loan repayment is 6 years, including a grace period that varies according to the nature of each project.

It is worth mentioning that the relevant results demonstrated that the loans, (accounting for LE250mn) granted for the beneficiaries, under the six contracts previously signed with the SFD, have had a significant impact on raising those beneficiaries' economic and social levels, a matter that squares with the objectives of these peoples.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 7 December to 11 December 1997

Closing on 11/12/97 354.13 Points

The NBE Index has increased 3.14 points to register 354.13 points for the week ending 11/12/1997 against 350.99 points for the previous week ending 4/12/1997.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Changes %
Alexandria Cement Co.	+8.7
CIB	+7.7
General Company for Silos and Storage	+7.3
Helwan Cement Co.	+6.0

Company	Changes %
Suez Canal Bank Alexandria National	-9.7
Iron and Steel	-7
Kafr El-Zayat Chemical Co.	-5.4
South Cairo Flour Mills Co.	-4.9

Al-Ahram Weekly

Backward march!

When the Palestinian Authority last week announced plans to conduct a census of the Occupied Territories and East Jerusalem, Israel responded with its usual diplomatic savvy: The Knesset scurried to pass a law banning the census in East Jerusalem.

Binyamin Netanyahu's argument was that conducting a census would undermine Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem. One problem with that argument, however, is that the status of Jerusalem has yet to be determined. That decision is to be taken during the final status negotiations, which, themselves, are yet to be held.

While Netanyahu's opposition to the census is, in itself, not surprising, it is telling. It reveals how deeply rooted is his hostility to the rights of Palestinians. What Netanyahu is actually saying is that come hell or high water, Palestinians would have *no rights other than those deemed permissible by their sovereign* overlord, Israel. This means, there will be no Palestinian state, no right to self-determination, no right of return and no rights to Jerusalem as a future capital.

Sadly, this conclusion is not just conjecture. *It is fact.* On numerous occasions in the past, Netanyahu has said exactly that, albeit in somewhat more ambiguous and diplomatic language.

Commenting on the Knesset's decision to ban the census, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa raised the following question: "Is this not an invitation to backwardness?"

Indeed, it is yet another invitation to backwardness, the only kind of invitation Netanyahu has been capable of issuing since his election to office in May 1996. And Netanyahu's backwardness extravaganzas are always packed. Settlements still continue in the name of Israel's natural growth. Security crackdowns are now so normal that they are no longer newsworthy. The negotiations have been stalled for so long that one wonders if they ever really began at all. And the Oslo Accords have been violated so repeatedly that they have lost all meaning.

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Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$ 1.5
Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	10 Riyals

A state of discontinuity

The Sharon plan reveals the extent of Israel's contempt for the Palestinians, writes James Zogby. The 17 December deadline has been reached, yet more decisive action may be necessary

The Middle East peace process has reached yet another fateful deadline. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had given Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu until 17 December [yesterday] to present a specific proposal for redeployment in the West Bank.

Past Israeli behaviour and the current Israeli debate suggest that Netanyahu, who is due to meet with Albright in Paris today, Thursday, will probably seek only to avoid antagonising the United States, and dodge accusations that he is frustrating the peace process. At the same time, Netanyahu will seek to protect his support base among Israeli hard-liners who reject any further West Bank redeployment.

Israel does appear ready to make some minor land concessions, amounting to about 10-13 per cent of the West Bank. The land surrendered, however, will only slightly alter the condition of the continuing occupation, by expanding the size of the existing Palestinian cantons in the West Bank.

US pressure on Israel to respond to the 17 December deadline has triggered a debate within Netanyahu's coalition, prompting a number of conflicting efforts to propose alternative responses to the United States' demands.

While there are some variations in the proposed plans, the exercise has not, in itself, been helpful in moving the peace process forward. In this regard, it is instructive to note that what has emerged as the compromise plan is the one offered by National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon. A situation in which Sharon emerges as the "realist" is bound to be a disappointment to the Palestinians, and is an indication of how far Israel has veered from the path toward peace.

What Sharon is proposing has been described as a "quilt of congested areas of Arab population lacking contiguity with one another". *This*, it will be recalled, closely resembles the "Drobbles Plan" first adopted under the Begin government in the late 1970s (when Sharon was in charge of settlement construction in the West Bank). The aim of the Drobbles Plan was to create Palestinian reservations, with local autonomy and no sovereignty, surrounded by Jewish settlements and further divided by a network of Israeli-controlled roads and security areas.

Even if, as Sharon now concedes, the Palestinian areas might ultimately be called a state, it will be a state of unconnected parts. The Palestinians will lack control over most of their land, all water and other resources, and passages not only with the outside but also between their many cantons.

That such a proposal is being seriously considered in Israel as a way to avoid United States pressure (Sharon briefed US officials in Washington on his plan last week) is indicative of how seriously the Israeli view of the peace process is flawed.

The intent of the current government in Israel is far afield from the goals of the Oslo Accords. This Likud coalition, like its Shamir-led predecessor, remains committed to the concept of *Eretz Israel*. It refuses to recognise the existence of a separate national community of Palestinians with rights that must be recognised and implemented. And it refuses to accept the proposition that security is a *goal shared by both parties* and can only be insured in the context of a just and comprehensive peace.

As long as this government recognises only its own rights *as legitimate* and sees *that its* security can only be established by force and control of land, we will continue to be presented with such proposals as the "Sharon plan".

But the *deadline of 17 December* is not a test for the Israelis alone. They will fail if they present a proposal as inadequate and as contemptuous of Palestinian needs as the Sharon plan. The real test will be how the US responds to Netanyahu's proposal.

Should Netanyahu fail to propose any "meaningful" troop movement, the United States intends to table its own proposal. The US will call for more substantial redeployment in phase two, insist on the settlement "time out" and create joint US-Israeli-Palestinian efforts both to implement the third phase of redeployment and to supervise the Palestinian effort against terrorism.

Such direct US engagement should be encouraged, but more will be required. The former South African system of apartheid and its repugnant system of Bantustans has been rejected as inhumane; the effort to implement a similar system by Israel must also be rejected. To determine whether *Israel passes* or fails its 17 December test, it will be important to look not only at the amount of land surrendered, but at the intent and direction of the Israeli redeployment efforts. In this context, it *will* be important for the US to review Israeli proposals and to insist that any redeployments establish connections between Palestinian-controlled areas.

An additional way for the United States to press home to the Israelis its concern that *Oslo be fully* and seriously implemented will be to announce, in addition to the above mentioned steps, US recognition of the Palestinian right to a fully sovereign state. Such recognition *would* be no more intrusive to the negotiating process than the US's insistence that Palestinians recognise Israel as a sovereign state. Negotiations, after all, are not about whether the parties *have rights*, but about establishing the mechanisms and procedures to implement those rights.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab-American Institute.

East and South: rivalry or convergence?

Hungary recently hosted a seminar to discuss whether relations between East European countries and those bordering the southern Mediterranean are competitive or complementary. Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, who took part in the seminar, gives his assessment below

Are the countries of Eastern Europe in a state of competition or complementarity with those overlooking the southern shores of the Mediterranean? This was the intriguing question discussed at a recent seminar to which I was invited by the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs. The question is based on the assumption that the two groups of countries are actually extensions of a main bloc made up of the countries of Western Europe, more precisely, of the United States and the European Union; in other words, the nucleus of what has come to be known as the North. This assumption is based, in its turn, on yet another assumption, *which is that our world is still unipolar*, that its centre is Washington, that it has expanded to include the EU and that it will gradually expand further to include the countries of Eastern Europe. *That this* seems to be the trend was borne out by the decision of EU leaders at their meeting this week to incorporate ten new members, mainly from the former Eastern bloc countries.

In the context of these assumptions, the aid which the West is pouring into Eastern Europe to help it become part of an expanded North can appear to be competing with the aid it is extending to the countries lying along the southern shores of the Mediterranean in order to bolster the Arab-Israeli peace process and limit clashes between the Judeo-Christian world to the north of the Mediterranean and the Islamic world to its south.

However, the basic premise on which the assumption is based, namely, that the world is still governed by a unipolar order, is highly questionable. It may have been true at the time of the *collapse of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration* of the Soviet Union in the early '90s, when, with the disappearance of the other pole making up the bipolar world order, the United States became the *self-appointed leader* of a unipolar world order. But it was not too long before other poles, including the European Union, emerged to challenge its position, portending a future world order based on multipolarity, not unipolarity. This development belies the assumption that the North is a harmonious whole, free of inner contradictions, which is expanding in smooth progression at the expense of the South.

What struck me most in Budapest was the long shadow which the experience of the East Europeans with the Soviet Union seems to have cast on their relations with its successor, Russia. Relations with Moscow are virtually non-existent. Blind to the possibility of any threat coming from the West, the former Warsaw Pact countries are pinning their hopes on NATO to protect them from their erstwhile ally to the east. Meanwhile, *the West is keeping Russia in line with* a carrot-and-stick policy, the stick being to keep Moscow out of NATO while incorporating its former allies into it, the carrot its designation as a "partner" of *the United States*.

Russia's position today is comparable to that of Germany when it was forced to sign the Versailles Treaty following its defeat in World War I. *Germany's humiliation* at the time spawned the Nazi movement, Hitler and World War II; Russia's frustration today could produce similar results. One manifestation of this frustration is the resurrection of a Communist Party *headed* by Gennady Zyuganov. Currently the biggest party in the Russian *Duma*, its emergence is indicative of nostalgia for a past which, whatever its shortcomings, ensured a measure of stability for the ordinary citizen. Another manifestation of deep frustration is the appearance of an ultra-nationalist party with fascist leanings, the second biggest in the *Duma*, led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky. The only factor ensuring the West's hold over Russia is its close collaboration with Yeltsin, who enjoys the confidence of the West, but suffers from ill health and lacks a coherent following.

If Russia is a source of deep concern for the West, *so too is the Middle East, where* Netanyahu's policies are driving the whole region towards greater polarisation and radicalism. This was clear in the boycott of the Doha conference *by even the most moderate Arab states, while all* the Arab states attended the Islamic conference in Tehran in open defiance of Washington, which strongly supported the Doha conference and has not *relinquished its policy of isolating Iran*.

An important difference between East European countries and those overlooking the southern shores of the Mediterranean lies in the way each regards Europe. For the former, it represents a return to their cultural roots in the post-bipolar world. The latter, on the other hand, have a very different perception of their northern neighbour, which they consider responsible for the creation of Israel in their midst. And, though Israel as a state owes its existence to the persecution of Jews by the Europeans, it is nevertheless keen on preserving its joint cultural heritage with Europe, thereby reinforcing Arab perceptions that it is a European outpost in the heart of the Arab world.

There have been a number of outstanding political figures, even under global bipolarity, who *came forward with a political philosophy based* on non-violence: Ghandi, Martin Luther King and more recently, Nelson Mandela who succeeded in bringing an end to apartheid in South Africa without the spilling of much blood. The philosophy of non-violence could eventually prove to be the best suited to the requirements of the post-bipolar world order. Significant in this respect was the Tehran conference's keenness to underscore the difference between Islam and terrorism.

Tony Blair took an important step in this direction by apologising for Britain's persecution of Catholics in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the time has come for Russia to apologise for its military interventions in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and other Warsaw Pact countries during the Cold War. Iraq should not be the only country to be penalised for similar acts. The frame of reference in condemning such acts should not be ideology, but the violation of international legality and the rule of law, particularly international law, and the principles derived from the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals in the aftermath of World War II. *Bosnia's civil war has proved* that Nazism is not the only ideology to generate war crimes.

In the final analysis, Europe must assume a large share of responsibility for the Middle East crisis. *To "normalise" the status* of Palestinians and relieve them of the persecution they are suffering at the hands of Israel, Europe must take serious steps to convince the Jews that they will never again be exposed to another *Holocaust*. One cannot expect the Arabs to accept the legitimacy of a state implanted in their midst if Europe fails to assume its responsibility for a crisis from which we are still suffering.

Coffee for thought

By Naguib Mahfouz

I used to visit certain cafés to meet writers and intellectuals. In chronological order, the first of these cultural meeting places was Casino Opera, followed by Café Riche, Ali Baba Café and Casino Qasr El-Nil. I was a regular client at the last one until my accident, after which I was advised not to sit at cafés.

There is a profound difference between cafés in the popular areas *like Al-Hussein and* the elegant cafés of downtown Cairo. In the popular cafés, you do not need to have company beforehand, because as soon as you settle down in your chair, you can start making friends. In the elegant cafés, it is another matter. If you happen to be by yourself when you arrive, you will certainly also leave by yourself. For me and my friends, downtown cafés were only meeting places from which to move ahead, to the cinema or theatre.

I have written a number of film scripts sitting at café tables. I wrote the script for a film directed by Salah Abu Seif as I sat in the Trianon in Alexandria, and the script for *Raya wa Sekina* in a café in Glymenopoulos. But when it comes to literary writing, I cannot go about the actual writing process except if I am sitting at my desk. Ideas and characters, however, may very well have been developed from my experiences at the cafés which I hurriedly jotted down as soon as I got home. Al-Fishawi is certainly the café which inspired me the most.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Washing away the shame

Al-Wafd: "What we need is a democratic Intifada which will clear a backlog of mistakes that have paralysed our political *life* and usher Egypt *into* a *new* era of equality among political parties. This will mean that no party should include the president in its ranks, which would inevitably lead to the government exerting every effort to keep its party in power regardless of the any legal considerations. This monopoly of the ruling party has undermined the core of democracy. Democracy requires the state to adopt a neutral stance towards political parties with no *fa*vouritism towards any particular one. So long as this is not implemented, the democratic and political institutions of this country will remain paralysed and terrorist groups will continue to attract youth to *join* them."
(Gamal Badawy, 11 December)

Al-Mussawar: "The Luxor incident should not discourage us from hoping that Egypt can emerge from its present crisis. We must have the courage to face up to the causes behind the shortcomings and the confidence to overcome them. We should be able to do this, as we have a nation with a high degree of awareness which rejects terrorism and sees in it a con*spiracy aimed at Egypt's present* and *future*. And we have a leadership that can lead Egypt to a better future and safeguard its security and stability. We also have a government which has a clear view of the situation and has the courage to face up to its mistakes *and to* erase the consequences of what took place in the shortest possible time."
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 12 December)

Al-Akhbar: "There can be no doubt that the decision of the Islamic summit on terrorism underlines *the need for political and societal efforts* to expose the attempts by terrorist groups, those sympathetic to them and those who stand to gain from acts of terrorism to distort the image of Islam the world over. The next step is to besiege and liquidate terrorism, and in this regard the conference assumes special importance in the fight against terrorism. If the Islamic nations can eradicate terrorism and racist hate campaigns directed at them, they will be able to play a more important role in a balanced world order."
(Nabil Zaki, 14 December)

October: "It is no longer important whether an Arab state has a religious or secular system, or whether *one can boast some trappings of democracy* while another is clearly dictatorial. The danger facing the Gulf Cooperation Council does not come from neighbouring Iran but from the US and Israel. And we in Egypt, despite *what we have suffered at the hands* of the Sudanese religious military regime, are still prepared to forgive and forget, and to start a new chapter."
(Mahmoud Abdel-Moneim Riad, 14 December)

Rose El-Youssef: "At the Hatshepsut Temple in Luxor, Naguib Mahfouz's moving words, the music and the songs as well as the flowers and candles, have succeeded in erasing the shame of the massacre. The terrorist groups are now saying, through the world's radio stations, that they made a mistake in killing innocent civilians. What is the punishment for such a mistake? And is it a mistake or a crime? They certainly miscalculated the reaction and solidarity of the Egyptians, and failed to gauge the response of nations harbouring them like the United Kingdom, which is now preparing legislation to tighten the noose around their necks. The big mistake which we admit to is the lax security which led to the massacre. The ceremony at the *temple washes away the shame* but still reminds us that ignorance and poverty can produce monsters who will strike at tourists."
(Fathi Ghanem, 15 December)

Al-Arabi: "Today we face a crisis which has exposed the shortcomings of all aspects of our society. And facing up to these shortcomings requires a concentration of efforts which can only come about by the citizens' true participation in everything from the loaf of bread to a seat in parliament. And this cannot be brought *about by a government half of which does* not speak to the other half and in which feuds between members are known to all and sundry. It cannot be brought about by a government which lives in the past and shuns the future, nor one plagued by nepotism and a lack of vision, and which only acts after the event. A government able to deal with the crisis must be on the way."
(Galal Aref, 15 December)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



Iranian President Mohammad Khatami was definitely the star of the week. I have tried to inject into his portrait all the acuity, eloquence and tolerance for which he is becoming increasingly well-known. His black turban, which could have been a focal point, *recedes into* the background, an indication of the moderate intellectual trend to which Khatami belongs. His thick eyebrows, long aquiline nose, and trim beard punctuate his face like exclamation marks, while his eyes, despite the glasses, retain their compelling gaze. I *portrayed* Khatami in the full flow of speech, with fluent hand gestures to underline his consummate skill as a diplomat, a conciliator, and a man of profound, clear thought.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Worse than a parody

The new president of Mauritania also happens to be that country's former president. But the elections in Mauritania are not the only ones of their kind.

The Arab world has recently witnessed a gradual increase in the number of similar elections, whether of new legislative assemblies or of presidents. The fact that general elections were held recently in Algeria, Morocco and previously in Yemen and Jordan, may tempt some to believe that Arab countries have entered the age of democracy and freedom. Arab political regimes now seem to draw their legitimacy from liberal democratic practice, rooted in such institutions as free elections, the rule of law, the separation of powers, and protection of civil freedoms (including freedom of speech and expression), all of which distinguish a democratic pluralist system from the totalitarian regimes which dominated many parts of the Arab world, eastern Europe and Latin America in the sixties.

In response to some domestic pressure and many foreign policy considerations, Arab regimes have sought to dress in democratic garb. They must face a world in which democracy is a basic criterion for admission to the international community. This is why various elections have recently been held in different Arab countries, which had never recognised democracy as a legitimate means for inducing change or for decision-making at the grassroots level. But several Arab regimes follow the policy that holding elections and obtaining the participation — even nominally — of a few political parties entitles the regime to raise the banner of democracy and call itself democratic.

Today, no one is deceived by these claims. Scepticism is generated by the procedure of elections, but especially by their outcome.

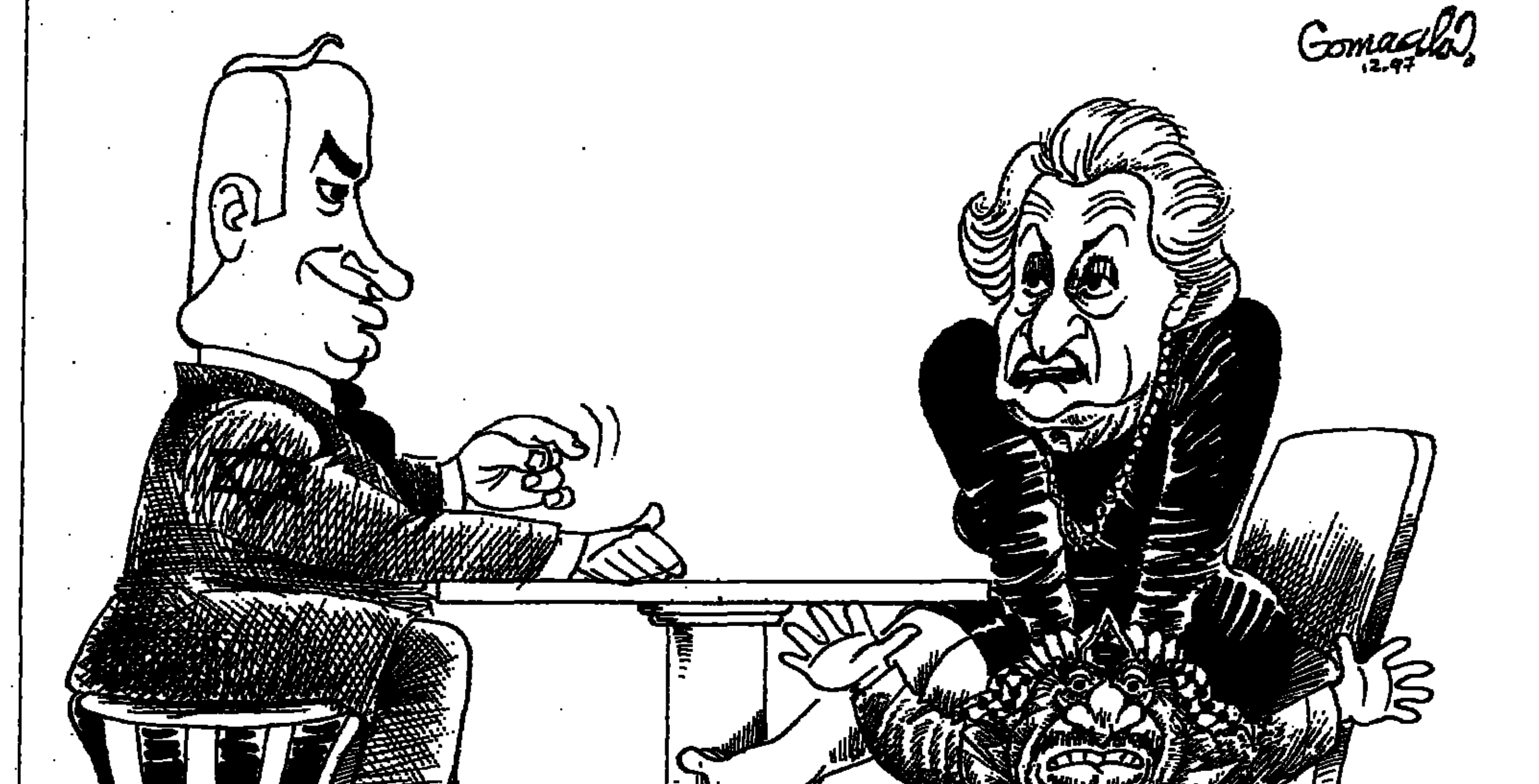
No recent elections in the Arab world have failed to witness charges of corruption or tampering with the ballot boxes, all vehemently denied. The ruling party, of course, aims for the usual 99 per cent landslide. No elections held in any Arab country have been void of violence, accusations and chaotic procedures. The elections have left ruling parties in place and, therefore, have failed to change policies and programmes. Polarisation and extremism have increased, the margin of freedom diminished, and the number of people distrustful of democracy within the ranks of the government skyrocketed.

In the countries which have relatively unblemished track records, the legislative authority was overridden when decisive issues were on the table. Freedoms of speech and of the press were restricted, and the margin of civil rights and mobility for the political opposition limited. It is often hard to tell the difference between regimes which claim to act in the name of democracy, and those which do not even pretend to do so.

Every time elections are held in the Arab world, one wonders what cause could possibly be served by all the money which governments pour into election campaigns, the mobilisation of security forces, election committees, banners, posters and election rallies. What about the astronomical sums spent to win supporters and defeat rivals, money which candidates must recover by any means once they are in office?

Political scientists assert that the damage inflicted by such elections far exceeds their advantages. Elections reflect a false democracy, which only leads to the further erosion of freedoms, nurtures terrorism, accentuates ethnic and factional fault lines, and can easily spark civil war.

The age of democracy is said to be upon us. But a democracy established in an alien environment, in the absence of the conditions for its development, actually undermines principles of democracy, erodes freedoms and compromises pluralism. Arab-style elections reflect negatively on the entire situation in Arab countries, both domestically and externally: precisely the situation we are in today.



Soapbox

Jerusalem now

The OIC Conference in Tehran was characterised by its ability to bring together 54 Islamic countries, high-level Saudi participation, the condemnation of terrorism in the name of religion, and the call for Islamic unity. If we consider these to be achievements, however, our aspirations are limited indeed. The summit, in fact, was no more than sum of the 54 countries with differences, disputes, and various interests that have often impeded understanding and integration.

To avoid behaving like an old cynic, I asked myself several questions. Have previous Islamic conferences ever issued resolutions that were subsequently implemented, given the absence of a mechanism to ensure the execution of such decisions? Have they been able to stem the flow of capital from the Islamic countries to the West? Are the Islamic countries capable of establishing a common market, or of undertaking any other such serious project? Pessimism and optimism apart, reality reveals more differences than agreements, more rhetoric than action, and aspirations which exceed the capacity for their achievement.

Only one matter remains the object of a Muslim consensus: Jerusalem. This city is vested with special status for Muslims. Perhaps the West and Israel do not want to recognise this unity of feeling. Israel talks about peace. The Arabs, too, want peace. But it will not be a real and lasting peace if it is built on violated rights and inequity. For peace to endure, it must be founded on justice. I hope the US and Europe — and Israel, of course — will understand.



This week's Soapbox speaker is chairman of Dar Al-Maaref and chief editor of October *magazine.*

Ragab El-Banna

Celebrating a post-mortem mutilation

Resolution 181 was hardly good news for the Arabs, writes **Gamil Mattar**. What it has become is nothing less than a terrible farce

It was inappropriate that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan should send Vladamir Petrovski as the UN special envoy to take part in Israel's celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the UN decision, on 29 November 1948, to partition Palestine. This resolution has long since lost its legitimacy. Indeed, the UN General Assembly itself was one of the major causes of the resolution's failure, having played a direct role in the international manoeuvres against the Palestinian people and the Arab position in general.

Kofi Annan, as an experienced employee in the UN General Secretariat, should be aware of Israel's extraordinary contempt for the UN. The UN has issued more recommendations and resolutions against Israel than against any other country. Most of these resolutions accuse Israel of aggression, expansionism, human rights violations, forceful occupation of land and altering the status quo in the Occupied Territories. Many of the resolutions enjoin Israel to rectify its offenses, permit Palestinian refugees to return or offer them compensation, and respect the Geneva conventions pertaining to occupied territories and inhabitants under occupation. Israel has implemented none of these resolutions. On the contrary, it has consistently treated the UN as a hostile entity. It conspired to assassinate Count Bernadotte, an intermediary appointed by the UN. It has only disdain for UN peace-keeping forces, and indeed has actively demonstrated its hostility. The UN secretary-general has at his disposal the records of the Qana massacre — eloquent testimony to the respect Israel has customarily shown the international organisation that he heads.

By sending a special envoy to attend Israel's celebrations of the UN resolution for the partition of Palestine, Kofi Annan has singled Israel out for special treatment. No other nation created since the founding of the UN has received such acknowledgement. This is all the more striking in that Israel, unlike India and Pakistan, is entirely indebted to the UN for its very existence. Were it not for UN General Assembly Resolution 181, there would be no Israel. As such, Annan might argue that, by participating in the ceremonies for the partition of Palestine, he is commemorating a decision made by the UN two years after that international organisation was founded. Was the partition resolution an achievement the organisation should be proud of?

The UN was established with the purpose of laying the cornerstone for lasting peace in the world following World War II. This aspiration has always been the sole and ultimate criterion by which to measure the UN's successes and failures. I believe I am not alone in claiming that Resolution 181 brought the Middle East none of the peace or prosperity which the founding fathers of that international organisation had promised. On the contrary, because of the UN resolution to partition Palestine, the people of the region have suffered the tragedies of warfare and oppression. Their hopes of freedom, democracy and development were quashed by the creation of a new state. Most of the people who came to inhabit it were from outside the region, but they took the place of the people who had lived on that land continually for centuries.

Annan's decision to send an envoy to Israel on this occasion is not only inappropriate, it is ill-timed. Developments are taking place on Palestinian territory that totally contravene both the text and spirit of the very partition resolution the secretary-general appears so keen on commemorating. It is no coincidence that, only a few days prior to this occasion, Netanyahu announced that he would forbid the establishment of a Palestinian state on any portion of Palestinian territory. The resolution the Israelis were preparing to celebrate called for the establishment of two states in Palestine. One of these states has been established. Yet when it came to the Palestinians, they discovered that the right to create their state had been transferred from the authority of the UN to that of Israel. The latter, meanwhile, has claimed possession of and sovereignty over all the territory originally designated for two nations.

At present, Israel refuses the UN any authority on the question of two nations and refuses to acknowledge any Palestinian, regional or international rights in this respect. The UN secretary-general, nevertheless, has made no attempt to assert the UN's rights with regard to the resolution. At the very least, he could have exercised his legitimate authority and declared, from New York, that the resolution has not been implemented. He could have announced that he would not send an envoy to Israel to attend the celebrations until all parties implemented the resolution providing for the establishment of two independent, fully sovereign nations.

That was the spirit of Resolution 181. Annan did nothing to acknowledge this spirit. On the contrary, he decided to send his special envoy to celebrate the half-implemented distortion of an international resolution.

Moreover, the UN envoy has been sent to Israel at a time when that government is seeking to impose a new partition that further violates the text and spirit of the 1948 partition. The architects of the new scheme have made no reference to the UN resolution of 50 years ago. That is only natural, since their plans bear no resemblance whatsoever to the original version. To these architects, partition means handing over a handful of the occupied territories for self-rule. The land Israeli is willing to "concede" represents six to eight per cent of the land originally designated by the UN for a Palestinian state. It escapes many, including myself, how the UN, along with 33 other nations, could participate in what is, in effect, an international farce of the first order.

The celebrants may believe they are commemorating a UN accomplishment. In reality, they have agreed to take part in a grotesque insult to the UN and the principles of international legitimacy.

It was once easy to tell the Arabs, "You rejected partition. You rejected Israel's peace overtures. You rejected Camp David. You have no one to blame but yourselves." The most cogent proof that this ridiculous game is over is the participation of the UN in these celebrations, at a time when Israel has taken over all the territory Resolution 181 addressed, defies the general desire for peace and is in the process of implementing a new partition scheme on the pretext of security.

Israel has always managed to put a convenient gloss on its policies of expansion and aggression. The infinite right is its latest inventions. Since Netanyahu came to power, the right has moved ever rightward, pushing Netanyahu to the left of every other Israeli right-winger. Somewhere in the far extreme of that unfathomable right, Israel's conditions for peace are being formulated.

The writer is director of the Arab Centre of Development and Futuristic Research.

Iraq's not-so-lonely fate

Where will the US look next? After the palaces, **Hassan Nafaa** suggests the presidential pockets

The crisis between the United States and Iraq could well be the last in a series that has lasted over seven years. The impact of the current crisis could therefore determine the future of Iraq, if not the future of the region as a whole. The crisis is not resolved. Russia succeeded in temporarily defusing the explosive situation by persuading Iraq to agree to the return of the UN inspection team. In return, Iraq received vague promises of assistance in obtaining the easing of the sanctions. US insistence that the presidential palaces be open to random inspection by the UN team, combined with US reluctance to demobilise forces in the Gulf, however, strongly indicate that all options, including military action, are still open.

From the Iraqi perspective, the causes for the latest crisis in the series are clear and fully justified. Iraq contends that it has fully complied with UN demands regarding the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. More than six years on, UNSCOM has not decided to terminate its mission and present its report to the Security Council, because the Americans who dominate the work of UNSCOM remain opposed to the lifting of sanctions. Acting on the conviction that sanctions could well go on forever regardless of the tremendous suffering of the Iraqi population, Iraq has decided to take the initiative of sparking a new crisis, preferring "to die standing rather than to live on its knees".

The current crisis is vastly different from the major crisis of 1990 and its after-effects, in terms of the nature of Iraqi demands and the local, regional and international environment. From the political and ethical standpoints, Iraq is fully justified in its demands, although from the strictly formal and legal standpoints, these demands may be difficult to defend. Iraq requested the withdrawal of Americans from the UN team on the grounds that their presence compromises the team's neutrality, impairing its scientific and technological mission and reducing it to a political committee. The unjustified extension of the team's work under various pretexts is attributed to both the domination of American inspectors and US hegemony in the new world order.

Iraq's claims are supported by fact. The US has repeatedly asserted that it will do everything possible to ensure that the sanctions remain as long as Saddam Hussein is in power. No clause has been included in the UN resolutions to link the lifting of sanctions with the fall of the Iraqi president, however. American intransigence seems unjustified, is legally unfounded and, more seriously, lends considerable credibility to Iraqi claims. Even if the Iraqis are not completely innocent of US accusations that they are obstructing the work of the inspection team, Iraq's political motives seem largely justified on both political and ethical levels.

From a strictly official perspective, on the other hand, the committee of inspectors is a legal team of experts designated by the secretary-general for an ad hoc task specified by Security Council resolutions. Its aim is to monitor and remove weapons of mass destruction. Hence, legally speaking, the experts do not represent their respective states, do not communicate information to those states, and are accountable only to the Secretary-general. In practical terms, of course, matters are totally different. The secretary-general cannot withdraw the American experts from the team. If he were to do so, he would confirm the aspersions Iraq has cast not only on the impartiality of UNSCOM, but also on the very independence of the secretary-general's office. Responding to Iraq's demands would be granting a state that is being punished the right to influence the composition of the committee implementing the sanctions against it. The Security Council was therefore obliged to level official accusations at Iraq, and imposing new sanctions in consequence.

Despite the inadequacy of the legal justification, Iraq went along with this scenario. While Iraq could see no "light at the end of the tunnel" it was aware of the growing shift in opinion at the regional and international levels in favour of the total lifting, or at least the easing, of sanctions which have produced devastating effects on the population. Iraq calculated that regional and international conditions would limit the violence of the US's reaction this time. With the exception of Kuwait, the entire Arab region, from the Atlantic to the Arabian Gulf, was overwhelmed by a tide of certainty that US policy towards Iraq is motivated by considerations which only serve Israeli interests and buttress Israel's domination of the region, to the direct detriment of the Arab peoples and regimes. Arab popular sentiment was sufficiently vociferous that regimes generally friendly to the US (Saudi Arabia, for instance), were forced to declare their opposition to any initiative involving the use of force.

Iraq carefully picked a propitious moment. The US administration had just faced a dual defeat in the region. The Israeli prime minister, whose intransigence had already become intolerable, gave US diplomacy the cold shoulder and closed all the channels through which the US could have manoeuvred. US pressure on the Arabs to participate in the Doha conference seemed to be a mere show of force and insolence, which further comforted major Arab countries in their decision to stay away. The US administration appeared helpless and weak, given both Israeli intransigence and Arab resistance.

At the international level, many states have grown tired of American obstinacy, and the deliberate exclusion from the region of other countries with economic interests and an independent position of their own. Within this context, it is only to be expected that these states should oppose military action against Baghdad and attempt to contain US ambitions in the region. Any unilateral military initiative, in this perspective, would be undertaken at an exceedingly high political price. The US itself may well have demanded that Russia take the political initiative in resolving the present political crisis. In this way, the US will at least have neutralised Russia if negotiations fail. Meanwhile, the US mobilised its forces and paraded its arsenal in the Gulf in anticipation of a more propitious moment at the regional and global levels, or to deprive Saddam of any fruit, no matter how symbolic.

Once again, the US seems to have gambled on the intransigence and impulsiveness of the Iraqi regime and its capacity to repeat the same diplomatic errors. But Iraq played its hand with remarkable skill. It reacted swiftly to the Russian initiative and accepted the return of the UN team in return for vague promises. The US crisis has therefore become even graver: a military strike in the current regional and global situation is unthinkable. On the other hand, demobilising would bring it under pressure to draw up a timetable for the completion of the inspection team's work, preliminary to the final lifting of sanctions or at least the elaboration of far more favourable conditions in the oil-for-food deal. According to US calculations, in both cases, Saddam Hussein would win a few points. If the US concedes, it will lose on all other fronts in the region. This is the reason for the US's insistence on the inspection of the presidential palaces. If the hero of "the mother of all battles" accepts this demand, he will have accepted not only suffering for his people, but also shame and dishonour. Since US insolence is limitless, the next request may well be the inspection of the presidential bedroom, military uniform, or undergarments. If Saddam rejects US demands, he may well have to face the military troops currently on maximum alert.

It will not be easy this time. Military action against Iraq will lead only to the shedding of more innocent blood, the suffering of more Iraqis, and the death by starvation of over one million children. This verges on genocide, punishable under international law as a crime against humanity. I believe that the US will consider military action only if it ensures the overthrow of Saddam and his regime. If this target is not met, the political cost will prove unaffordable, particularly in the long run.

Meanwhile, the decision to oust the regime in Baghdad forcibly could have long-term repercussions with unpredictable implications for the security of the region. The absence of a strong central government in Baghdad at this point could lead to the physical and legal fragmentation of Iraq. Even if this does not happen immediately, the chaos that will prevail after the collapse of the regime will encourage incursion from numerous regional forces, such as Iran, Turkey and possibly Syria and Israel — precisely what the US, the Gulf States and possibly the entire international community have been trying to avert. The US, however, overrun as it is by deep-rooted pro-Israeli elements, may conclude that this chaos may be necessary to distract the Arab world from events on Palestinian territory, the Judaisation of which is unprecedented since the beginning of the century.

The US and Israel may believe that they will control the outcome of the crisis. Since the beginning of the game, however, the ball has been in the Arab court. Giving a US inspection team (albeit one in UN clothes) access to the bedrooms of an Arab president is an insult to all Arab leaders. Unilateral US control of the crisis will be disastrous for all the Arabs. Can the Arabs forget Saddam Hussein for a moment, and think instead of Iraq and of the dark future which awaits all of us if we continue to turn the other cheek?

Iraq has been subjected to an international inspection raid unprecedented in ancient or modern history, involving U2 reconnaissance planes, satellite pictures, television cameras, remote sensing and environmental monitoring. After seven years of close examination of every minute detail of life in Iraq, the US claims that Iraq is still hiding chemical weapons. The US has come to regard the Iraqi regime as the most vicious in human history, and therefore deserving of damnation at US hands (during the US-instigated war with Iran, on the other hand, Iraq was regarded as a docile regime which deserved not only US assistance but weapons of mass destruction as well). Netanyahu's regime, armed to the teeth, is not considered a threat by the US. If Netanyahu decides to use his nuclear arsenal, he will use it to eradicate the Arabs. The US would not consider this decision a crime against humanity; for the US, after all, Arabs and Muslims are not human beings.

The writer is a professor of political science at Cairo university.

Al-Ahram Weekly



Iman Moustafa as Thaïs

Where fleurs du mal still bloom

Alexandria is decaying. The desert beckons. **David Blake** combs the shore line

Jules Massenet: Thaïs; Cairo Opera Orchestra: producer Jean Louis Pichon; conductor Patrick Fournillier; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 9 December

Who's for meditation? Thaïs is. She must have done quite a bit of it until half way through the opera, eureka! She has decided — it is God she needs, not Nicias or the golden gang of gay Alexandria. She hit upon it and she sticks to it.

Thaïs is no angel, but she is a very nice girl in spite of what the libretto says of her. If you need real operatic seduction *Parsifal* beats the lot. Thaïs does not fit this grand seductress model at all. She is no Lulu or Delilah. She is a geisha, more or less. She is nice and, since she is played by Cairo's prima donna Iman Moustafa, she is tall and handsome as well. She is more a Gustav Moreau. Soiled things and people swirl around her, but she remains unbesmirched. So she presents an unsolvable problem to a lascivious monk on the run from spiritual things to which he has been dedicated. The story presents him to be suddenly confronted by a soul also partly on the run herself from the things she knows too well. They collide. Thaïs sticks to God, passes into holy sanctity, and the monk Athanael is left to cope with what is left of his life without her.

Thaïs was presented in great splendour at the Garnier Opera in Paris in 1894. By 1914, the work was torpedoed in the first great European war. Various attempts to add it to the operatic repertory over the following years were unsuccessful. It remained steadfastly rooted to the ocean floor until the Massenet Festival at Saint Etienne refloated it, more or less in this production.

Patrick Fournillier was the active spirit behind it and, due to his special touch with opera and with Massenet in particular, it is come to a sort of end-of-century success. Fournillier and his team have given the opera a slant which fits it neatly into the sleaze and turmoil of the late 1990s. It is no longer a relic of merely social or erotic interest from another age, but rather, it has a more subtle metaphysical background. It is a weepy, not even romantic however. It is the end of a romance that never was — and that is sad. There are flowers in *Thaïs*, but they are all dead, funeral blooms.

Massenet wrote 20 operas. *Thaïs* was late and, by then, he was very famous. It was written for a very bright, blonde-looking American girl, Sybil Sanderson. She was unknown until Massenet settled on her, admired her bright, very high lying soprano voice, her tall physique and her ambitious go-getting manner. She must have been a sight on stage, rather like Henry James's lady, Isabel Archer. She became, as they say, the toast of Paris, but of nowhere else. She tried London and New York when *Thaïs* had brought her sudden notoriety, but, like Josephine Baker of another age, she didn't export. She belonged to Paris.

Catastrophe ruined the chances of *Thaïs*. You do not have to like it; it is the operatic cup of tea of people of a certain persuasion. Sentimentally sweet and rather sad — not qualities guaranteed to make it a hit piece for the broody, murky 1990s. That is, until Pichon's team joined with Fournillier to take it in hand, giving it a new twist which was obviously there in the first place.

A strange exhumation because they have shown *Thaïs* to be a masterpiece, rather like the Oscar Wilde-Strauss *Salome*. It is a rare bloom from the corrupted garbage garden that includes *Lulu* and *Wozzek* of Alban Berg. Wagner's Kundry, empress of the mystical glamour of corruption, rules these ladies like beings out of nightmares. One wonders how the Almighty gets along with all these authentic saints of the *nostalgie de la boue*. The theatre adores them— as do composers. Massenet found in the pathetic story from Anatole France's novel an opportunity to indulge his passion for soft, silky velvet music which runs on forever like satin over ivory, in long folds of melody, perfectly fitting into the French musical idiom. Yet, the opera was sturdily rebuked by French musical critics until these times. Now, *Thaïs* basks in her sunset glow as an authentic creature of the *Gotterdammerung*. She may have even influenced Strauss's Salome who, on seeing the body of another monk, Saint John, flew into a turmoil of lust which finally brought her a halo.



Evgenij Demerdjiev as Athanael

This very clever, subtle production is the jewel of the Franco-Egyptian musical year which has already given to Cairo some historic performances. The cast is Egyptian and they have all done a splendid effort to add to the success of this unique production. Massenet did make, in spite of the flowing sugar of *Thaïs*, a clear, straightforward telling of the woman from the elegant, debauched life of Alexandria to the time of its slipping into a stylish, but corrosive decadence.

Thaïs meets her monk whose disapproval of her way of life attracts and changes her. The monk and Thaïs are alike — people, both misfits and outcasts from the sanctity of officialdom. Fit and ready for each other, they meld into a sort of intimate, loving understanding that has tenderness and pathos. When Thaïs is with the monk, he runs and jumps, pounces even like a young leopard: when she is not about, he walks like an old man. Both artists, Iman Moustafa as Thaïs and Evgenij Demerdjiev as Athanael, achieved this intimacy perfectly, and it is very touching how their understanding becomes a love. She embraces him and his vision. He, as it turns out, embraces only her.

The opera has no prelude; it flows effortlessly into the action. It begins in shadow, not purple for passion, but mauve, something cooler, older. The monks of this *Thaïs* are evening creatures. It is the start of the wonderful work that Michel Theiul does with his lighting.

When the opera opens, the cenobites are gathered in the dusk, about to break their fast. Athanael, one of the brotherhood, arrives from the city of Alexandria. *Voila donc la terrible cite!* Richesse, erotica, nude Venus enthroned with Thaïs who was a love from his childhood, now a centre of the worship of the Golden Calf, the city and its flesh and diversions. He is appalled. He must rescue her for God. Whether Anatole France or Massenet is responsible, the attitude of the cenobite brothers to Athanael's religious outpourings is ironic.

The following scene is the house of Nicias, overlooking the harbour of Alexandria. As with all the remaining scenes, the decor is light, fresh, with clear Ingres-like colours and very splendid. The city is there, alluring, yet falling away under the sheer weight of its own celebrity. Sad. Thaïs, in spite of her conversion, is a sad opera. She renounces her life of passion to the consternation of the elegantly wild troupe who form the household of Nicias. She has fallen under the spell of the fiercely religious monk.

Act II brings *Thaïs* to the peak of its power to move an audience in the theatre. This it achieves by the music, an almost passive emotion compared to what is taking place on the stage. Thaïs agrees to follow Athanael to the desert. She rests, dismayed at what she is about to do, but feels the need to leave the devils of flesh and the golden life behind her. We have heard all this before: from the elegies of the Roman poet Horace right up to the Violetta of *Traviata*.

But Massenet here places his trump card on the scene, the Meditation, as musical operatic history has called it. As Thaïs sits lost in deep meditation — that's it. Massenet snatches the entire scene from the prima donna and her wild monk and gives the opera to the solo violin, here played with heavenly unction, and richly passionate emotion by Mahmoud Osman.

This is where *Thaïs* stops, pauses, then continues, winding, genuflecting through emotions without name, through the heavy throb of the song-like solo that holds the ear as an omnivorous climbing orchidaceous sound. A bath in warm Chanel. The Meditation does the trick. The opera moves on to another plane — transfiguration and a halo of night blooming lilies. This tune went around the earth. The opera was drowned for generations, but the Meditation from *Thaïs* carried Massenet up to Elysium.

There is a lovely scene of a moonlit folly of a temple, icy, like an early de Chirico. So soon after the Meditation, it is almost too much, too sharp, but the angels from Saint Etienne know what they are about. *Thaïs* now goes into a sort of celestial overdrive. No production hitches, everything flows on towards the final elevation of Thaïs. The cast has so far done well. Now, under expert guidance, it reaches out to arias and results the Cairo Opera has never attempted before. Reda El-Wakil as Palemon uses his majestic appearance better than ever before. The voice of a sort of archangel. Hassan Kamy in the role of Nicias has not much to do until his absolutely last phrase in the opera as, torn and bereft, he watches his muse Thaïs take off with the flying monk into the desert. The phrase he has to sing is a beauty — long, going ever higher, until he tops it with a cry of pain which keeps its shape, its pitch, and startles the theatre. The baritone Evgenij Demerdjiev is young, handsome, of a rich and as yet lyrical baritone voice which will take him to the great heights. He has sensational presence and the voice under pressure is firm. He acts with musical understanding — an elemental singer.

And Iman Moustafa as Thaïs. All the things one had hoped for her have been seen also by Pichon and Fournillier. She is a dedicated person as Thaïs. She looks wonderful, especially in the white linen robes of penance. Very Thaïs and very like Norma. She is no longer inhibited by her height; in fact she has been obviously encouraged to make the most of it. She is a heroic splendid figure. Her movements, which were before awkward, are now graceful and meaningful. She has learned the greatest lesson for a singer which is to remain still and listen on stage and to make her silences eloquent. This is a real person, moving and sincere, as the courtesan, grandly imposing, a sort of idol. After the Meditation, she becomes young. Her voice managed all the complications and high wire effects of the soprano role inherited from Sybil Sanderson.

In the first scene of the last act, Athanael goes to find water for Thaïs to drink. The age-old glitter of the city of Cairo showing at its centre, the Opera House, something so simply beautiful as these two hopelessly splendid, lost people, kneeling humbly, crouching by a cracked pot of fresh water to drink, an almost holy benefaction, is an imposing sight. And so the fable goes quickly to its end. The gorgons had been flying very low over Thaïs during this year of her conversion. She had had enough of the beach-combing dinner parties in town and at Agami. The writing was on the wall. A year or two more of it all and she would be back on the water front again.

Athanael, Pichon, Fournillier and Moustafa had made clear what the Meditation was about. Thaïs and Athanael had met, they loved and parted, and the Meditation lives on, played with an increasingly vivid prophecy by Mahmoud Osman, a voice of the Annunciation of tenderness and compassion. And then they part, going each to their own particular fate with the hope that the sincerity of Thaïs's elevation gives her what she has searched for, and that the gods are worthy of such an action. That is the least paradise could do for her. Curtain on a strange unique evening.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

André Gelpke (Photographs)
Goethe Institute, 5 El-Bustan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 19 Dec.
Aspects of contemporary photography under the title Nostalgia.

Group Show
Faculty of Fine Arts, Zamalek. Until 21 Dec.
Five artists from the Saint-Etienne Fine Arts Faculty exhibit their work.

Zeinab El-Saginy (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 23 Dec.
Works under the title Egyptian Tales.

Hassan Rashed, Naguib Mahmoud & Rafaat Zaki (Paintings)
Spiro Arts Gallery, 6 Rd 77C, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 351 4362. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 23 Dec.

Members of the Photographic Salon of Egypt
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American Uniersity in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 23 Dec.

Golo (Cartoons)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 23 Dec.

Ralf Korte (Installations)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 24 Dec.
Works under the title Gain of Time.

Les Souffles
Museum of Modern Art, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 24 Dec.

Effat Hosni (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 25 Dec.

Assem Sharaf (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6-9pm. Until 30 Dec.

The Paris Salon in Cairo
Al-Ahram Gallery, hall of Al-Ahram building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786 300, ext 494. Daily 9am-9pm. Until the end of the month.

Hand Made in Egypt
Ethno Gallery, 38 Rd 6, Maadi. Tel 350 6473. Daily 10am-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until the end of the month.
A large collection including Azza Fahmy's jewelry, textile works, furniture and candleworks.

Gamal Abdel-Ghani (Pottery) & Yassin Dersha
El-Shomou' Gallery, 12 Rd 150, Maadi. Tel 350 0081. Opening: 18 Dec, 7pm. Daily 11am-7pm. Until the end of the month.

Gurna Old and New
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Opening 21 Dec, 7pm. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until the end of the month.
An exhibit of drawings, sculptures and designs.

Farghali Abdel-Hafiz (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 3 Jan.
Works under the title Love in Venice.

Collective Exhibition
Sheba Gallery, 6 Sri Lanka St, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 9 Jan.
Jewelry by Suad Raja and Zina Hemady, textiles by Sylva Nasrallah and Michel Pastore, pottery by Evelyne Porret and Suzanne Wissa Wassef, and watercolour paintings and ink drawings by Rana Chalabi.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

The Twilight
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex-Bustan St), Downtown. Tel 578 6833. 18 Dec, 6.30pm.
Directed by Ahmed Maher.

Miyamoto Musashi
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 354 9431. 18 Dec, 6pm:
Directed by Tomu Uchida (1961).

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.

20 Dec, 6pm: Gezu' Di Nazareth, p. 1 (1977), directed by Zefirelli.
21 Dec, 6pm: **Deserto Rosso** (1964), directed by M. Antonioni.

Sept Morts sur Ordonnance
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. 24 Dec, 7pm.
Directed by Jacques Rouffio.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Metro
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm; Thur-Sat midnight show. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 577 9537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Eddie Murphy.

Men in Black
El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith.

Face/Off
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
An intelligent and entertaining action film with John Travolta and Nicolas Cage.

Conspiracy Theory
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Julia Roberts.

City Hall
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Al Pacino and Bridget Fonda.

The Peacemaker
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nicole Kidman.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Andel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 577 9537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Along the Southeastern Border

Hanbeb We Ne'eb (We'll Love and Rise Above)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Diana, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Farouq El-Fishawi.

Afrit El-Nahar (Daytime Demon)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin st, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.
With Nour El-Sherif.

MUSIC

Opera Thaïs
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 18 Dec, 8pm.
The Cairo Opera Company, with soloists Iman Mostafa, Eugenie Demarchiev, Hassan Kamy, Reda El-Wakil and Mona Rafla, perform under conductor Patrick Fournillier and director Jean-Louis Pichon.

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 18 Dec, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Jazz Recital
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdeen. Tel 391 9956. 18 Dec, 9pm.
Yehia Khalil performs.

Amadeus Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 19 Dec, 8pm.
Piano soloist Ghada Shaker and conductor Mustafa Nagui, perform with the orchestra J.P. Rameau's Suite No 6 for Strings, Mozart's Piano concerto No 11 K. V. 413, Dvorak's Two Valses, OP 54, No 1, 4, Grieg's Peer Gynt, OP 46, No 2, 3 and Afify's Valse premiere, dedicated to the Amadeus Chamber Orchestra.

Arabic Music Ensemble & Religious Song Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 19 Dec, 8pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 20 Dec, 8pm.
Raouf Zeidan performs.

Junko Nakayama
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 20 Dec, 8pm.
The celebrated Japanese pianist, assisted by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, will perform Chopin's First Piano Concerto, under the baton of Youssef El-Sisi.

Development Centre Concert of Talents
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 21 Dec, 7pm.

The Academy of Arts and the Cairo Conservatoire
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 21 Dec, 8pm.
Classical works under Maestro Taleb Ganiev.

Oboe and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 22 Dec, 7pm.
Mohamed Saleh performs.

DANCE

Cairo Opera Dance Theatre
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdeen. Tel 391 9956. 19-23 Dec, 9pm.

The Nutcracker Ballet
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 23-24 Dec, 11am.
The Cairo Opera Ballet Company, directed by Abdel-Moneim Kamel and the Cairo Opera Orchestra, conducted by Ivan Filev perform Tchaikovsky's celebrated composition.

THEATRE

Happy Days
National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. 19-21 Dec, 8pm.
Scripted by Samuel Beckett and directed by Peter Brook.

Peter Brook's Plays on Screen
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861.
18 Dec, 6pm: **The Tragedy of Carmen**
19 Dec, 6pm: **Secrets of Carmen**
20 Dec, 6pm: **Marat Sade**
21 Dec, 12 noon: **Moderato Cantabile**

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.

Fantazeyet El-'Alam El-Rabe' (The Fourth World Fantasy)
El-Talia, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 593 7948. Daily 8.30pm.

El-Shaytan Ya'ez (Satan Preaches)
Ezbekiya Theatre, George Abiad Hall. Tel 591 7783. Daily 7pm.

Hamlet
National Theatre, El-Zorqani Hall, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 8pm.

Allahom Eg'aloh Kheir
National Theatre, as above. Daily 9pm.

Zizo Mahboob Zamanoh (Zizo the Beloved of His Time)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily 10.30am.

Alabanda
El-Fardos Theatre, El-Beohth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 9.30pm.

Cinderella
Puppet Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 0954. Daily 6.30pm; Fri & Sun 11am.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Haram. Tel 386 3952. Daily 8.30pm; Wed & Thur 10pm.

LECTURES

Political Role of a Foreign Community in Egyptian Modern History (The Greek Case)
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 18 Dec, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Dr El-Sayed Ashmawy, Cairo University.

Open Discussion with Peter Brook
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 21 Dec, 7pm.

Marcel Proust par le Professeur Tadié
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 23 Dec, 6pm.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice. Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries

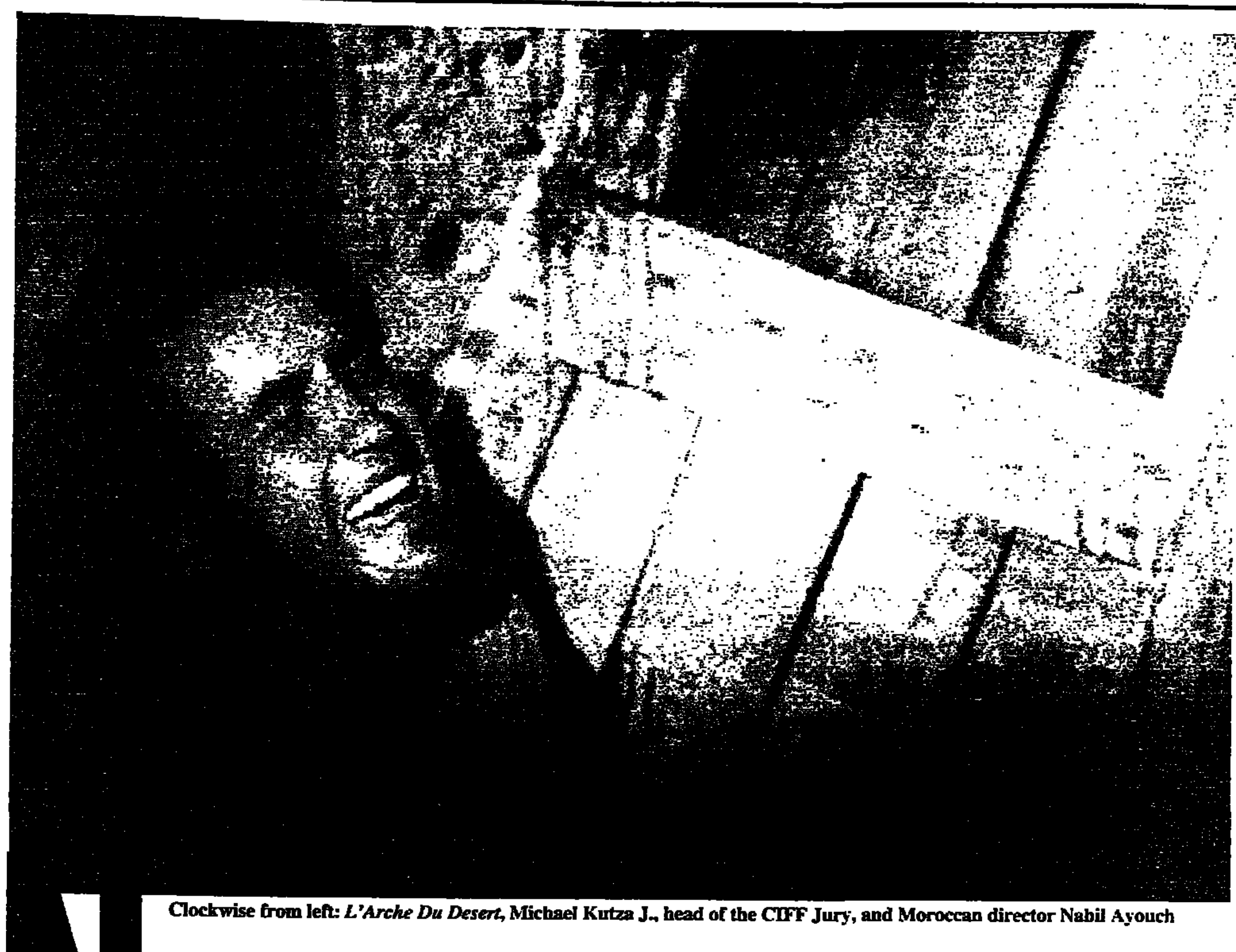
THIS year's **Alexandria Bienale**, the 19th, is full of disappointments and surprises. Disappointments include the paucity of countries and artists participating, the awarding of prizes to certain countries for political, rather than aesthetic, reasons, and the fact that, yet again, the Bienale is being held at the same dilapidated venue. Surprises include the fact that **Mohamed Abla** was awarded the grand prize.

Zeinab Al-Saginy

Khan El-Maghraby hosts paintings by **Zeinab Al-Saginy**. These deal with the sorrows of childhood and make use of symbolism, including animal motifs, derived from myth and folklore.

Paintings by **10 Moroccan artists** are on exhibit at the **Centre for International Cultural Cooperation**. These are in a wide range of styles, from the calligraphic to the surreal, symbolism to social realism.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***







Clockwise from left: *L'Arche Du Desert*, Michael Kutza J., head of the CIFF Jury, and Moroccan director Nabil Ayouch

No sinking this Titanic

Khairiya El-Bishlawi on the awards and highlights of the Cairo International Film Festival, now over for another year

Last Saturday's awards, presented by the 21st Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF), have seldom been so well deserved. And seldom has the jury's decision so accurately reflected the opinions of the general public, especially so with regard to the film that won the Golden Pyramid.

As someone who has followed the CIFF since its beginning, I believe that this year's awards marked yet another coming of age for the event. That this should be so is due in no small part to the personae and expertise of Michael Kutza J, the American director and critic, founder of the Chicago International Film Festival and head of the CIFF Jury Committee.

The top awards for script, direction and film went to the French production *La Femme de Chambre du Titanic*. Out of 17 competing films, *La Femme de Chambre du Titanic* was certainly the most popular among the public, whose interest was not deterred by the absence of subtitles in either English or Arabic. A tribute indeed to the eloquence of the visual language of the film.

The plot, with which most audiences felt an almost instant rapport, is mostly set in a poor and tightly knit mining community in France, one of whose members wins a race, the prize for which is the opportunity to attend the launching celebrations of the ocean-going liner, the Titanic. He spends one night in an elegant room. An attractive young woman knocks on the door. She tells him that she is the femme de chambre of the Titanic.

After a charming one-night stand he returns to his mining town where coal, fire and smoke dominate everything. There he receives the news of the sinking of the Titanic and the death of the woman who passed through his life like lightning, leaving him impossibly infatuated. The experience opens his imagination and he weaves an illusionary love story which he repeats to his friends in the most elaborate details.

This tale becomes an instant success and every night more and more people want to hear more. The young man's wife becomes very angry, but he lets her in on his secret, assuring her that it is all no more than a flight of fancy. As his story snowballs, the owner of a travelling theatre troupe asks the man and his wife to play the two lead roles in a play based on the tale. The play becomes a hit and is performed in many places. One night, while the man is acting his role, he catches a glimpse of the real femme de chambre. He rushes behind her only to discover that she is a whore and that the pimp who arranged for their brief encounter in England had brought her to France to blackmail him and get his share of the wealth the story has earned the miner.

Upon his return to the stage, he improvises a new ending based on what he has just discovered — drowning the woman and thus liberating himself from his infatuation.

Another fine film, which reaped the Special Jury Award, was the Polish production *The Book of Great Wishes*, directed by Slawomir Kryhski — a poetic unravelling of the emotions involved when a group of orphaned children are moved into a home for the elderly. The meeting between the old, who have ceased to engage actively in life, and the children, whose appetite for play and pleasure is insatiable, provides the springboard for an examination of loneliness, pain, old age and childhood. The beauty of the film is further enhanced by a breathtaking performance by the young girl in the lead role who, surrounded by leading Polish theatre actors, seems to have influenced their acting as much as they influenced hers.

The award for best actor went to Davor Janijic in the Slovenian film *Outsider*, directed by Andrej Kosak. The film deals with the life of a young man who grew up in the former Yugoslavia under Tito and who is currently undergoing a post-fall-of-Communism crisis. As old symbols collapse, a generation walks out of one "illusion" only to find themselves battling with a nightmarish reality that crushes all hope.

The Egyptian films in the festival this year, including *Harmonica*, the only film in competition, were mostly undistinguished. Other Arab films, particularly those from Morocco, were far superior.

Nabil Ayouch's *Predestined*, which won the Naguib Mahfouz Award, is a psycho-drama involving a young couple, a man and his wife, living in Tangiers. The film is a loose reinterpretation of the road movie. Ayouchi, born and raised in France, with practically no knowledge of Arabic, casts a bird's-eye-view over the desert panorama, zooming in on those slices of Moroccan life that can be gleaned from the surface — the life of hotels, police stations, streets and alleyways.

The appearances of life, and its underlying verities, are addressed from the personal perspective of the director. Typical of the genre, most of the events of *Predestined* take place on the road, as the couple start on a journey which begins happily but becomes increasingly difficult as both protagonists face an unknown fate.

Kalthum Bernaz's *Keswa: The Lost Thread*, was certainly one of the more promising films by a female Arab director. The plot is based on old social customs and traditions in Tunisia. Unlike many North African directors, male and female, Bernaz seems to be more interested in investigating the reality of her society rather than pleasing Western audiences through a combination of desert scenery and old Arab superstitions. Reem Al-Torky won the award for best actress for her role in the film, giving a convincing performance as an alienated young woman who, after a bitter experience in France, returns to her homeland only to face difficulties adapting to customs. She finally regains her faith in the family and the homeland after spending a night with a taxi driver, who helps find her way to the place where the family is celebrating her sister's wedding.

Another good film, also a road movie, is *Asphalt Tango*. It is a joint French-Romanian production with the British actress Charlotte Rampling in the lead role of a madame. The film is full of comic scenes, exposing the social and psychological disintegration afflicting the young in post-Ceausescu Romania.

Dictatorship and political corruption figured prominently in a number of this year's films: the Bosnian *An Unexpected Walk*, Azerbaijan's *Strange Times* and Russia's *Tzarevich Alexei*. The latter depicts the unfair treatment the character of Alexei, son of Peter the Great, has received from historians.

One of the most powerful Arab films at this year's festival — and sadly screened out of competition, was *L'Arche Du Desert*, directed by Mohamed Chouikh. It is set in Algeria and deals with the heavy price exacted on individuals by obsolete social values. The director, also the producer of the film, reconstructs the story of Noah's Ark, except that this time the ark floats on a sea of sand, indicating the impossibility of salvation. It is one of those North African films that are, in my view, primarily preoccupied with pleasing the Western audience. In it, Westerners get all they expect from an Arab film: a love story between two young people from warring tribes against the backdrop of barren desert life.

The parallel activities on the fringe of the festival this year were as important as the official festival. They afforded the public the opportunity to watch films from sub-Saharan Africa as well as a host of historically important films. Among the international films shown this year were Marco Bellocchio's *Hands in the Pockets* and *The Eyes and the Mouth*; Sidney Pollack's *They Shoot Horses Don't They* and *Tootsie*; a special showing of Alain Delon films; Paul Verhoeven's *1992* and *Basic Instinct* and a number of films by Alan Parker and Roger Carmen. In short, any serious movie-goer found in the 21st International Film Festival a microcosm of the main trends in cinema.

Plain Talk

Every year I receive an elegantly printed booklet produced by UNESCO called *Bursaries for Artists Organised by the International Fund for the Promotion of Culture*. The programme was established in 1994 with the avowed aim of "promoting the professional growth of young artists in all disciplines." It provides opportunities for training and work residency abroad.

Bursaries for 1998-99 are tenable in 31 different countries, including Jordan and Palestine. The former offers a residency at the Dar Al-Fonoun in Amman for those specialised in painting, print-making, sculpture or installation. The latter offers a bursary funded by the Culture and Free Thought Association, tenable in Khan Yunis in Gaza. Artists interested in ceramics, glasswork, sculpture or photography are invited to apply.

A quick glance at the booklet would seem to betray an odd process of specialisation in which some countries appear to have a paramount interest in the visual arts while others are happier concentrating on the various performing genres while yet others focus on creative writing. I was pleased to see, though, that this year textile design has been added to the list, with Bangladesh offering a bursary for a weaving specialist.

India, not surprisingly, given the extent of its heritage in the visual arts, is offering a three-month residency at the Sabskriti Kendra Centre, located in the foothills of the Aravali mountains, a few kilometres outside New Delhi, in the hope of "enabling creative people from diverse disciplines to work, study and interact in harmony with each other and the natural environment."

Dance bursaries are offered, quite naturally, by Cuba and a number of other Latin American countries. In Europe both France and Austria are offering bursaries in contemporary dance theatre, while the Dance School of the National Opera in Paris invites applications from those trained in classical dance.

The slimness of this booklet belies its ambition. What the programme is all about is nothing less than fostering the necessary process of facilitating a greater understanding across seemingly unbridgeable cultural chasms. It aims at encouraging cooperation in the arts as a means to enhance mutual respect between the peoples of widely differing cultures.

The question I always ask myself when I receive the booklet is why Egypt is not included. Certainly the concept of the resident artist is not new here. At one time, I remember well, studios existed in Luxor for students of the Faculty of Fine Arts who would spend a few months there as part of the curriculum. I also remember that when I accompanied Youssef El-Seba'i, at the time minister of culture, on an official visit to Yugoslavia, we visited a marvelous centre in which a great many artists were undertaking residencies, including a number of Egyptians. This centre was housed in a number of ancient and beautiful buildings. They served as working and living space for artists from all over the world. The residents received sufficient funding to cover the cost of materials and of food, and all that was required from them was that at the end of the residency artists present the centre with a single work. El-Seba'i was so impressed by the system that he resolved to introduce it into Egypt, and a memorandum to this effect was prepared. I do not know what happened to the project.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Books

The *turc barbare* and *juif arabe*

Out of Egypt: A Memoir, André Aciman: Harvill Press, London (paperback) 1997

Out of Egypt, like *Out of Africa*, tells the story of a moribund colonial experience. Narrating the saga of his Alexandrian childhood and early adolescence in the '50s and early '60s, the young André Aciman — a vaguely Italian Jew of Turkish origins, who believes he is French — lives in the midst of a cosmopolitan, multinational extended Jewish family composed of a Turkish grandfather, French and British uncles, Italian grandmothers and a mother of Syrian descent.

Marked by strong overtones of eurocentrism, reminiscent of Durell's *Alexandria Quartet*, the narrative marginalises the city's native Egyptian population, who provide a sometimes conventionally subjugated but oftentimes ominous background to the tale. With the noted exception of a physician — whom André's grandmother describes as a "good Arab" because he saved her life, although "a generation ago he would have been no better than this boy servant bringing us tea" — contacts with Egyptians are determined by class-based clientele relationships.

André's only native friends are his family's domestic workers, all afflicted with varying degrees of physical or mental dysfunction. "Om Ramadan had only one eye... Hisham, the *sofragi* — the waiter — had only one arm... Then there was Abdou, the cook, an alcoholic. And his much older cousin, an albino, also named Abdou...had a terribly ulcerated leg... And finally, Fatma, the errand girl... limped."

André's family circle refuses to establish causal links between the workers' debilitated condition and the country's long history of colonial exploitation, brandishing, instead, an arsenal of handy racist clichés to rationalise what they perceive as the national characteristics of an inferior people. "Even dogs bark at Arabs," remarks Madame Marie, André's Greek tutor; while his Uncle Isaac responds to commands of *taffi al-Nur* — turn off the light — during the 1956 Suez War by screaming: "Just wait for this war to be over, and we'll show these savages. I've suffered their nationalistic claptrap long enough."

Although the racist discourse shows no apparent cracks on the surface, André's privileged position as a child narrator, transcending both race and class, ruptures and undermines the narrative from within. Seeking refuge from parental authority in the kitchen, André participates in the workers' derisive verbal subversion of the dominant ideology. "I loved their gossip... their complaints... about their bosses, my mother, her screaming, complaints about their sons who had turned to crime, about health, disease, death, scandal, housing, poverty and aching bones."

The young boy's only contact with Arab culture takes place in the kitchen, where the workers occasionally let off steam by dancing to the sounds of improvised concerts. "Fawziah, sitting with the open kitchen door swinging between her knees, drummed elaborate rhythms on both sides of it, tapping away with such speed that it drove our one-armed Hisham to stand up and imitate the vibrant hip twirls of a third-rate belly dancer. Everyone laughed, including Hisham, and we begged him to dance again, the three of us coaxing him with renewed drumming on the kitchen table."

When the workers respond to Madame Marie's racial slurs by chanting a short half Greek, half Arabic couplet taunting the Greeks — *"Ti kanis? Ti kanis? Bayaa makunis,"* (how are you, how are you?/ seller of broomsticks) — André laughs as heartily as everyone else, participating in the collective deconstruction of the supremacist discourse. Although de-centered and marginal to the plot, the child's friendship and identification with the only Egyptian protagonists of the narrative — who also happen to be working class — may at some unconscious level, express a rejection of his own class identity.

Underlying the child's attempts to participate in subverting the dominant discourse is his mother insecure status as a Sephardic (Arab) Jew and a handicapped woman — Andre's mother is deaf. The daughter of an Italian mother, the Saint, and Monsieur Jacques, an Aleppo-born Syrian, André's mother — who incidentally is never named, but only identified according to Arab tradition as the mother of her son — is rejected by her in-laws as an Arab and a cripple. "They're miserly, bigoted, Arab-shantytown Jews imitating the fast-car, cocktail-lounge airs of Europeans. But they're Arabs through and through," Monsieur Albert, André's grandfather, explains to his son in an attempt to dissuade him from marrying the *tarsha* — the deaf woman. Andre's grandmother, nicknamed the Princess in reference to her position as a refined Ashkenasi, is more direct in her rejection of the *tarsha*: "A cripple I won't have", she warns her son.



André Aciman

Throughout the narrative, Aciman satirizes the Ashkenasi discrimination against Arab Jews since his patrilinear grandfather's claims to European descent cannot be substantiated. As the scion of a Turkish family, Monsieur Albert's Northern pretensions fall flat and, when challenged by Monsieur Jacques, his last recourse consists in assuming "the stately arrogance of erstwhile Ottoman masters [of the Arabs]." During a confrontation between André's two grandfathers, "the degenerate *turc barbare* called the *juif arabe* a dirty, scoundrel Jew."

Branded as a *juive arabe* and a *tarsha*, André's mother plays the part — lending credence to the stereotype. A loud and boisterous young woman, she haggles in the market place like a true *bint balad* (daughter of the land; a strong-willed, hot-tempered woman who stands her ground).

Although fiercely attached to a mother he loves and protects, André has also internalised his family's class prejudices and has ambivalent feelings about the Arab *tarsha*. A particularly virulent haggling match between his mother and the local butcher deeply traumatises the young boy. "All I was aware of during supper that evening was the echo of the butcher's scream as he threatened to kill the Jewish bitch on the spot, followed by my mother's furious, dizzying shriek as she dared him — if he was man enough — offering to hand him the cleaver from his table." Repulsed, Andre cannot sleep that night, and is pursued by the shrieking voice of the deaf woman. "It was an ugly, coarse, demented shriek, and no matter how I tried, no other thought, no conjured sound could quite muffle its persistent, frightful ring in my ears."

Yet André ultimately learns to accept his mother's heritage by opposing the dominant code and choosing to be on the side of the workers — who are, like his mother, Arab and handicapped. At the end of the day, when the adolescent has to leave the country, he knows that once "out of Egypt", he will always long for Alexandria — a city he never knew he loved — and seek to recapture "time lost and lost worlds".

Reviewed by ***Faiza Rady***

Al-Ahram Weekly

Prevention pays

A green seal of approval, or just a publicity stunt? **Ragi Halim** examines ISOs

Big business is not automatically associated with environmentally sound behaviour. But industrialists, businessmen and environmentalists are finding it more cost-effective to act than to react: prevention, they feel, is more profitable than a cure when it comes to environmental damage. And they are setting targets to be met, hopefully, with the single-mindedness they apply to the profit imperative.

At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the Business Council for Sustainable Development emphasised that business and industry need tools to measure environmental performance and develop environmental management techniques, explains Dr Abdel-Basset El-Sebai, of the Egyptian Organisation for Standardisation (EOS).

In 1991, the International Standards Organisation (ISO) established a Strategic Advisory Group on Environment (SAGE), which brings together 20 countries, 11 international organisations and 100 environmental experts.

An environmental management seminar for the Arab and Mediterranean region, held in Cairo from 30 November to 1 December, was organised under the auspices of the Egyptian Ministry of Industry in cooperation with the ISO and AFNOR, the French ISO member. The seminar, attended by over 200 participants from all over the Arab world, was part of a programme aimed at helping developing countries to preserve the environment and achieve sustainable development through the application of international standards. Incentive is supplied in the stamp of approval environmentally-friendly companies receive from the accreditation body.

Dr Anwar El-Tawil, director of the ISO Developing Countries Programme (DEVCO), explains that the International Standard Organisation aims to establish management system standards according to the PDCA (plan, do, check and act) principle. This principle is applied on a daily basis through environmental management systems (EMS).

"Environmental issues concern us all," he notes. "EMS help enforce commitments to environmental legislation, and take into account pressure from concerned consumers and shareholders. They improve the corporate image. The system makes sense for businessmen because it actually increases market opportunities through the promotion of a 'green' product. Besides, environmental management systems cut costs, so we can expect a revolutionary change in corporate culture."

Traditional management systems are based on a more curative approach to the environmental problem and depend on remedying existing ills; their principles are to wait, cure (react), manage crises, and make the polluter pay. In contrast, El-Tawil notes, EMS-driven corporate policy makes it imperative to predict, prevent (act), remain prepared for emergencies, and profit from pollution prevention.

Jacques Salamitou, chairman of the AFNOR EMS Commission for Organisations, clarifies the new, holistic approach which characterises the EMS. The system, he explains, is "part of the overall management system, which includes organisational structure, planning activities, responsibilities, practices, procedures, processes and resources for developing, implementing, achieving, reviewing and maintaining the environmental policy. Ethically, an environment system is an important component of sustainable development."

All very well for industrialised countries, one would think. Indeed, specific obstacles face the implementation of EMS in Third World countries. The lack of information, training and resources, both human and financial, represents the basic problem, according to Salamitou, but the need to acquire and adapt technology, as well as "some cultural traditions", could also pose obstacles.

To remedy these possible difficulties, EMS proponents suggest that implementation should be flexible, adapted to available resources, and based on a well-known initial situation. Specific performance levels need not be imposed, they add; rather, a continual improvement process should be targeted.

Tarek Genina, director of the hazardous wastes unit at the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Authority (EEAA), explains that, in Egypt, International Standards Organisation regulations can be used to enhance the regulatory systems that are not yet fully in place. "An ISO-certified industry is not exempt from regulatory requirements," cautions Genina; "but it allows the government to focus limited regulatory resources on less-committed industries, thereby broadening prospects for compliance. According to the Environment Law (No. 4/1994), by February 1998 all establishments should conform with rules concerning emissions, workplace air pollutants, solid waste management, and hazardous substances and hazardous wastes," Genina notes.

Article 1 of the environment law provides a three-year grace period for industrial establishments existing at the time of promulgation to conform with the law. The question now is, what will the situation be after this period comes to an end?

Dalia Lotayef, of the EEAA, suggests that three cases must be taken into account. "First, establishments which managed to conform with the provisions of the law need only keep written records of the environmental impact of their activities. The EEAA is to review the data and ensure that they are accurate. Second, establishments which have taken steps towards compliance need to apply for an extension of the grace period for an additional two years. This extension will be granted if serious steps have been taken towards compliance, applications were submitted by last August 1997, and a Compliance Action Plan is developed by this month. Finally, establishments which have not complied by February 1998 are also entitled to apply for the extension of the grace period."

After February 1998, on the other hand, establishments will be classified according to two main criteria. Those establishments that have applied for an extension of the grace period, and have been granted an additional two-year grace period, will present a progress report every six months, explains Lotayef. Establishments which have failed to abide by the law, and did not apply for an extension of the grace period, will be subject to the penalties stipulated.

Shayma Barakat, who works at Prime Environment, a private-sector company, notes: "Some people are worried that the environmental regulations will be misused as publicity — a sort of green seal of approval — rather than a guarantee that the product is environmentally friendly." But as an important limit on such possible misuse, the validity of the certificate does not exceed three years. In case of contraventions, at any rate, "we, the certifying body, withdraw the certificate. This is simply because the certifying company cannot risk its reputation and its licence which could consequently be withdrawn by the accreditation body," explains Michael Schollt, head environmental auditor, at Tav Rheinland.

The Helsinki link

A Mediterranean strategy in the fight against pollution is mapped out and ready for implementation, writes **Mahmoud Bakr**

Environment ministers from the Mediterranean countries recently concluded their four-day conference in Helsinki. The conference, held within the framework of Euro-Med partnership, focused on environment policy. The plan, however, will depend on the assistance provided by the European Union. Integrated management of coastal areas, water sources, waste management and desertification are top of the list of Mediterranean priorities. Urgent environment problems, known as "black spots" — industrial pollution, potable water and sanitary drainage — will receive attention first.

In her speech before the conference, Nadia Makram Ebeid, head of the Egyptian delegation, said the provision of potable water and systems for waste treatment are priorities in Egypt.

The Helsinki declaration issued at the end of this conference stressed the importance of comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East region as a basis for sustainable development. The protection of the environment, the ministers said, represents the chief prerequisite for the protection of public health and the improvement of living standards.

An all-too-familiar sight: could Kyoto mark the moratorium on belching buses? *photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid*

Striking a balance

ADDRESSING the UN climate conference held in Kyoto, the Egyptian state minister for environmental affairs, Nadia Makram Ebeid, emphasised the urgent need to protect the countries threatened by climate change, writes **Mahmoud Bakr**. She stressed the principle of shared responsibility, but did not discount the specific conditions prevailing in each country. Ebeid called for compensation in cases where national economies will sustain damages as a result of the implementation of the proposed policies. "The objective is to avoid resolving the problems of certain regions and countries while simultaneously creating problems for other countries in other areas of the world."

The Egyptian delegation was particularly concerned that the definition of commitments and the timetable for the reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions be included in the protocol. Egypt's stand was consistent with Third World concerns that environmental considerations may jeopardise basic resources or otherwise limit industrial growth in developing countries. A balance must be struck between economic development and environmental preservation, Ebeid noted.

Cooperation projects between Egypt and other countries are currently being implemented. Ebeid commended the effort, undertaken with assistance from the Japanese private sector, to increase green areas in the desert expanses of Egypt. Planting trees will contribute to limiting heat retention through the absorption of carbon dioxide.

Giving a new twist to the old slogan "think global, act local," Ebeid emphasised the extent to which environmental preservation will affect individuals personally, all over the world.



Sweet sixteen

My parents were down-to-earth, no-nonsense people, who tried to endow us with good minds rather than good looks. They never begrudged us the purchase of books in vast numbers, but became suddenly discouraging whenever clothes were concerned. My father's favourite saying was that a beautiful woman could wear a potato sack and launch a new fashion overnight; if, on the other hand, she lacked physical grace, no amount of expensive assistance would alleviate her predicament. Consequently, in either case, lavishing more than minimum cash on 'rags' was out. These words of wisdom entitled him to deny any request related to the acquisition of anything beyond the bare necessities in the realm of frivolities.

I remember the contents of my wardrobe as being particularly scanty in those days. Anything hanging there looked uncannily like a school uniform. Well past my early teens, I wore my hair in tight plaits and sported golf-type shoes, elegantly complemented with white cotton socks. This was my attire for both everyday and special occasions. The adoption of the potato sack was a moot issue as far as I was concerned. Being decidedly on the hefty side, I already looked remarkably similar to many kilos of potatoes. Adding the sack was not going to do anything for me. "You look your best in dark colours," my mother would inform me, buying me yet another charcoal-grey skirt for the new season.

I distinctly remember a dark blue affair, touted as the last word in fashion, that I wore the summer I turned sixteen and met my first boyfriend. He was Italian and pimply, not exactly Prince Charming, but under the circumstances, I could not afford to be more discriminating. We were both holidaying in a mountainous resort in Austria, I with my family, as usual, and he with a group of friends. We did a few of the things young people in love usually do, though not many. We were both very shy and I was further intimidated by the presence in his group of a couple of very good-looking young women, parading outfits I had only had a chance to observe in fashion magazines. I could not imagine why someone in his right mind would want to abandon such graceful sirens to hang around a heavyweight. They went bathing in the lake while we sat in the lobby of the hotel looking into each other's eyes, or walked around the garden holding hands. I was furiously opposed to any form of aquatic sport involving a public appearance in the black swimming suit tucked away at the bottom of my suitcase, and bearing the mention XL.

The day before he was due to depart, he invited me to a farewell party thrown in his honour at the hotel by his friends. I refused at once. He insisted. Relenting, I asked my parents' permission. They refused at once. Piqued, I insisted. It was finally decided that I would go for an hour. I was left to concentrate on the logistics of the venue.

I did not dance. I had never been taught how to. Though extremely well read for my age, I seriously doubted that in these particular circumstances, erudition would entirely make up for an absence of social grace. I begged my father to show me some basic steps. Reluctantly he attempted to guide me around the room, but gave up almost immediately. He informed me that I moved almost as gracefully as an ironing board, which reminded him that my mother had promised to iron his shirts. He abandoned me to my misery and I concentrated on the inspection of my mother's wardrobe in the remote chance that I could borrow something slightly more festive — and large enough — to transform the pumpkin. My search yielded nothing save a pair of earrings, which looked positively silly peeking out from behind my plaits. Shoes presented even less of a problem. I only had the crepe-soled pair I wore every day. I finally settled for my dark blue skirt and one of my brother's long-sleeved white shirts, in which he warned me several times not to move, insisting that it had never been subjected to so much fat at once.

I thought slitting my wrists would have been a wiser choice when I finally made it to the hotel's small nightclub. All the women were lounging nonchalantly on low couches, holding cigarettes and drinks in their bejewelled hands, their bare golden shoulders glowing in the candlelight.

My suitor gallantly rose to the occasion, however, and, stepping forward, guided me at once towards the dance floor. We tried to waltz. I hung on to him for dear life while my crepe shoes obstinately stuck to the parquet floor, making a sucking noise reminiscent of a loud kiss every time I tried to obey his desperate attempts to whirl me around. My dancing partner looked mildly puzzled at these passionate smooching sounds. He did not seem to suspect that they emanated from my feet, and increased the pressure of his hand on my girdle-bound waist, perhaps in the hope that this experiment would reveal the source of this amorous wheezing. Push and heave as he might, I remained floor-bound, occasionally rewarded by a hiss from my footwear, indicating that some effort had been painstakingly exerted.

Finally, we sat down and looked into each other's eyes, as we had every day since we had met. I consoled myself with the thought that, after this evening, I would never have to see him again.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Christmas cookies with molasses

Ingredients:
3 cups white flour (sifted)
1/2 cup butter ghee
1/3 cup powdered sugar
2/3 cup molasses
One egg
2 tsp. cinnamon + 1 tsp. ginger + 1/2 tsp. ground clove + 1 tsp. sodium bicarbonate + 1 tsp. baking powder + 1/2 tsp. salt

Method:
Beat the butter and sugar in a bowl vigorously until they become white in colour. Add the molasses and beat again. Add the egg and repeat beating. In another container add all the remaining dry ingredients. Mix them well together. Add them gradually to the molasses blend and mix well until they become a consistent dough. Flatten the dough with a roller over some sprinkled flour, to one cm. thickness. Form the biscuits with biscuit cutters, any shape you have, and place them in a butter coated oven tray. Bake for almost ten minutes in a 360-degree centigrade preheated oven.

Moushira Abdel Malek

Restaurant review

Bow wow wow

Andrew Steele samples the catnip

It's oh-so-very right-on — the Fat Black Pussycat and the Jazzy Dog Café, to give it its full moniker. A newly-opened jazz bistro, just next to the rather more sedate Tia Maria on Jeddah Street in Mohandessin, brought to you by the people who gave you L'Aubergine and Le Tabasco. On the night we visited it seemed just the sort of place where Cairo night-life's movers and shakers were moving and shaking. The space fairly reeks of savoir-faire, the black and cream decor is dimly lit with candles and the lighting grid swathed in black muslin. Back-lit silhouettes of a variety of hep cats add to the ambiance of designer sleaze. This is a clientele that likes its liquor, and the surroundings say as much. Cairo seems an aeon away. The L-shaped space has extraordinary acoustics, which are used to full effect. Trad-jazz fills the air along with smoke and designer perfume. The seating is squashy and inviting, the bar friendly and well stocked. The menu is as long as your arm, and what a menu, to be sure.

Divided by country into 25 sections, there are 120 wild and wonderful *mezze* to tickle your tastebuds, hailing from such disparate locales as Ghana and Croatia, with a sprinkling of just about everywhere else you can think of thrown in for good measure. Aside from this frankly impossible bill of fare, there is a separate flyer announcing the Black Cat specials of the day, amongst them fondues and pizzas and more substantial meaty rations. We decided to plunge into *mezze-mezze*-land, mustering every ounce of wit and guile to paste together the meal that dreams are made of. For those unwilling to undertake such a daunting labour of love, the Black Cat kitchen has put together its own, considered, plum selections as a footnote to the multifarious sections.

We decided upon a veritable culinary globe-hop, encompassing France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Lebanon and Mexico, with India and Switzerland thrown in for good measure. The portions are small, so be warned: what may at first glance seem like a prospect for a cheap night out can become more than a trifle pricey with *mezze* after *mezze* after *mezze*...

And what *mezze* they are. A selection of *bruschetta* from Italy, marvellous *nachos* from Mexico, mini *zaatar* pizzas from Lebanon, and a quite astonishing venison and armagnac paté from France were among the highlights. But honours must also go to the Emmenthal and kirsch Fondue Savoyarde, which, although not quite as kirsch-ful as we had hoped, was certainly more than a glitzy centrepiece. A total of 11 *mezze* and a fondue kept four of us extremely happy for an hour or more, the *mezze* arriving in a series of little flurries rather than *en masse*. The service is impeccable, which is quite some feat bearing in mind the heaving profusion of bright, young (and middling) things. The sting for the above with four local Stellas was a more than split-between-four-able LE234, still leaving scope for countless return visits to sample something new. Book a table well in advance or, unlike the indisputably replete pussycat whose name the establishment bears, you'll be sniffing around the cat flap.

The Fat Black Pussycat and Jazzy Dog Café, 32 Jeddah Street, Mohandessin
Tel: 3616888

Al-Ahram Weekly

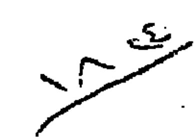
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

Across
1. Lean-to (4)
5. Incapacitates (5)
10. Hairstyle (4)
14. Inflorescence (4)
15. Pointed arch (5)
16. Squalid neighbourhood (4)
17. Restrain (4)
18. Fish genus (5)
19. Indian custom of self immolation (4)
20. Picnic pest (3)
21. Twitch (4)
22. Land; flaming (6)
24. Cosmetics item (7)
26. French holy women, abb. (4)
27. Hospitals surgery chambers, abb. (3)
28. Coagulating (8)
32. Hollers: keens (5)
35. A garment (5)
36. Graceful deer (3)
37. Region (4)
38. Valleys (5)
39. Measure of capacity (4)
40. Relieve; free (3)
41. Speak thickly; die (5)
42. First principles (5)
43. Most loathsome (8)
45. Blemish (3)
46. Nicknamed "Beehive State" (4)
47. Water tank (7)
51. Musical brass instrument (6)
54. Eat between meals (4)
55. Owing (3)
56. On the sheltered side (4)
57. Corrode; gnaw (5)
59. Ridge of loose sand (4)
60. Baron von Munchhausen; hypocrite (4)
61. Rescuer (5)
62. Frosted (4)
63. Swabs (4)
64. Russian tyrants (5)
65. Disorder; slatternliness (4)

Down
1. Go away! (5)
2. A carnivore noted for its fiendish howl (5)
3. Ejects; discharges (5)
4. Cozy corner (3)
5. Some players (6)
6. Greek market place (5)
7. Latex; exploit financially; siphon off (4)
8. First lady (3)
9. Legislators (8)
10. Sustain; dance attendance upon 96)
11. Hail; droop; banner (4)
12. Boaz' wife (4)
13. Overlook; fail to mention (4)
21. Startles; dissonances (4)
23. A Baltic nation (4)
25. A carbonated drink (4)
26. Move in sneaking manner, miscarry (5)
28. Fraud; swindle (5)
29. Rainbow goddess (4)
30. Not any 94)
31. Acquires (4)
32. Farm building (4)
33. Prima donna's melody (4)
34. Attaches by marriage (4)
35. Flounder: splash (5)
38. Bulkiest; largest (8)
39. Portion; separate (4)
41. Give as example; serve with a writ (4)
42. Attack violently; wallop (4)
44. Sound adjusters (6)
45. Skinflints (6)
47. Maker of system of signals or sytems for secrecy (5)
48. Call forth; surmise (5)
49. Incised writings of the Norsemen (5)
50. Necessity (5)
51. Serene (4)
52. Hotchpotch (4)
53. Glean (4)
54. New star (4)
58. ... Mohammad (3)
59. Imperceptible; hazy (3)

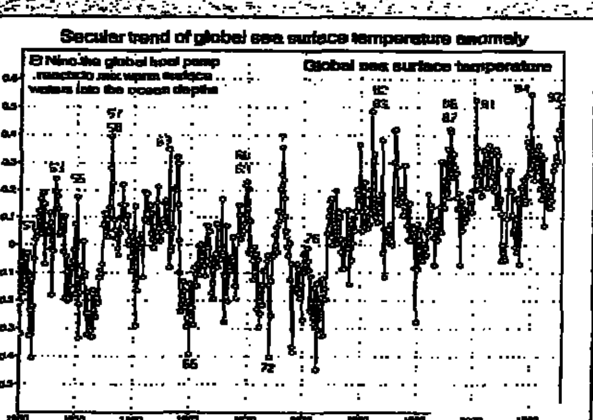
Last week's solution

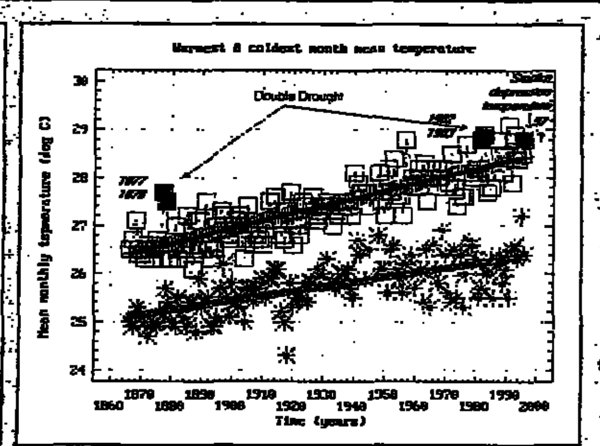


Cooking up a storm

When you think of the South Pacific, you think of palm trees, endless beaches, and the blue blue sea. Now it may be time to think again. As the Kyoto climate change conference ends in what the activist group Greenpeace has termed "a tragedy and a farce", and the temperature on the Equator continues its inexorable rise, Peter Snowdon looks at a little boy with a big future — El Nino







Above: 1.7 million hectares burning on Sumatra and Kalimantan in early September (the light and dark spots). Far left and left: impact of global warming in SE Asia, as measured in sea surface temperature deviation from the norm, and the steady rise of air temperature in Jakarta

In Dante, hell is cold. In Indonesia this autumn, it was hot. The air was filled with a dense pall of acrid smoke, often inaccurately referred to as "haze", which according to some reports reached as far afield as Japan. Over a million hectares of forest burned and burned, perhaps uncontrollably, certainly uncontrolled. Meanwhile, the drought which had begun as far back as April continued to keep the rains at bay, denying firefighters the standing water they needed, while the poisonous smog that hung over everything made it difficult if not impossible to ferry emergency supplies to those regions in the interior where the crops had long since failed. One disaster compounded another, while politicians did what they do best — remonstrated, passed the buck, and finally washed their hands.

Meanwhile, throughout the archipelago, conditions were worsening as the hot dry weather stretched on and on across Irian Jaya and into Papua New Guinea, where now, in mid-December, literally millions of subsistence farmers are facing imminent starvation as a result of the worst drought in living memory, aggravated by unseasonable frosts in the highlands.

Elsewhere too, not just in Southeast Asia, the world is increasingly out of joint. While delegates at the climate change conference in Kyoto last week squabbled over the difference between 6 and 7 per cent in the regulations that will govern CO_2 emissions for the next fifteen years, the real unregulated climate was undergoing violent changes all around them: bush fires stalked unopposed through northern Australia, while large swathes of Ecuador and Ethiopia were being washed away in floods of truly Biblical proportions. Southern Africa, for its part, is even now preparing for famine, as there too the rainy season waits and waits and does not rain. Everywhere, it would seem, it is suddenly either too hot, too wet, too dry or too cold.

Welcome to the wonderful world of El Nino. Or more precisely, of ENSO — the El Nino-Southern Oscillation — the biggest climatic instability in the world, whose "teleconnections" (long-range effects) embrace all five continents. Although El Nino is a relative newcomer to the media spotlight, the phenomenon itself is as old as the hills. The name — which means "Christ child" in Spanish — was coined by Peruvian fishermen at least as long ago as the 16th century, to describe the beneficent warm winds that would sometimes arrive on their coast around Christmas. Paleoclimatological research suggests that the underlying mechanism and associated events may date back at least 5000 years. But it is only in the last twenty years that El Nino has been identified as ENSO, and that its workings have begun to come under close scientific scrutiny.

The basic mechanics of the phenomenon are quite clear. An ocean current arriving from the west loops round the bottom of Australia, joining with warm water blown across the Pacific by easterly trade winds. Together they soon collide with the Indonesian archipelago and various other obstructions which prevent then from finding a way out into the Indian Ocean. As a result, a pool of warm water accumulates around Papua New Guinea. Once this pool has grown sufficiently substantial, the heat has to be dispersed, and the warmth eventually sets off east towards Peru by means of a "sympathetic oscillation", while cooler water rushes in to take its place. It is this reversal of the usual ocean currents that is known as the Southern Oscillation. The easterly trade winds that are typical of the Southern Pacific drop, and the wet weather of Southeast Asia takes a prolonged holiday on the coast of South America, leaving its homeland exposed to droughts of varying degrees of severity.

ENSO has been going on for some time, and its history is already rather impressive. The landmark event as far as the modern record is concerned occurred in 1877-78 — the years of the great "double dry", when crop failures led to widespread famine throughout south and east Asia, where they were the proximate cause of between 9 and 13 million deaths in four provinces of northern China alone. It was apparently the impact of this event on Indonesia which led the Dutch colonial administration to establish the first serious meteorological data network in the region, which still exists (extended and improved) today. This wave of activity continued through to the early years of this century, to be followed by several decades of relative inactivity. However, over the last twenty years, El Nino has been drawing attention to itself once more. Not only has it reemerged as a major player in the world climate system, but the ENSO events of the last few years show signs of evolving in some rather mysterious and disturbing ways.

The story of this evolution really begins in 1982-83. These years saw only the second "double dry" event in the Western Pacific in recorded history, and the first since 1877-78. For much of the intervening period, the gap between West Pacific dries (when they occurred) usually lay somewhere between five and eight years. But over the last decades there has been a steady quickening of the pulse. Since 1982-83, we have seen severe ENSO-inspired droughts in 1987, 1991, 1994 and now again in 1997. The gap has narrowed to two years. Moreover, this year's event is by some measures the most severe since 1877-78, and many specialists are now forecasting a second impact next year. If they are proved right, then both in terms of frequency and intensity, the last fifteen years will have established a dramatic new pattern for ENSO's behaviour.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO EL NINO? For some, the answer is obvious. Robin Harger of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) in Paris told the *Weekly*: "In the early 90s, we said that if El Nino picks up in frequency and intensity, then it will mean in all probability that global warming is upon us. Now that has happened, and in spades. Increased temperature in the surface sea water has pushed the thing into faster and harder reaction, in order to remix the heat into the depths of the ocean. It's simple: just watch a pot of water over a hot element and see what happens when the temperature rises. You don't need astrophysics to interpret that!"

Harger, who spent fourteen years in Indonesia researching the history of El Nino, was one of the scientists who took part in a meeting of the United Nations Environmental Programme's Working Group on ENSO events and climate change in Bangkok in 1991, which warned of the possible impact of global warming on ENSO behaviour. For Harger, what was hypothesis in 1991 is now, in the light of the last three events, a racing certainty. "In my opinion", he told the *Weekly*, "we are already deep into global warming. The situation on the equator is alarming, as it points to over 1.5 and perhaps even as much as 2 degrees C increase in underlying temperatures over the last 100 years, according to data from Indonesia, the Philippines and El Salvador. The increased frequency and intensity of El Nino, the melting of glaciers, and so forth, all point to the same thing."

Harger's research into the history of the Indonesian experience has not only convinced him that the statistical record should be taken seriously, but also that global warming is in itself catastrophic for El Nino-affected areas, whether there is a systemic relationship between the two phenomena or not. Over the last 130 years, the data collected by the Dutch and later the post-independence government of Indonesia show that the range between the coldest and the warmest months of the year in Jakarta has not simply moved up the scale by a couple of degrees, but has widened out as it has done so by at least a degree, as El Nino has churned up cooler water from the ocean below in its vain attempt to offset the rise in underlying temperature (see graph above, right). One degree may not sound like much; but if you are a farmer or a fisherman, you would know that it can be vital. For scientists, it also provides a rough measure of climate variability. Even leaving frequency and intensity out of account, global warming is thus exposing the archipelago to a greater range of extreme El Nino behaviour than was known 100 years ago.

If Harger is convinced of the connection, other researchers, however, are far less certain. Billy Kessler, a US government climate researcher, was much more reticent when I spoke to him. "Climate change is full of non-linear effects which make guessing — or modelling with a computer — the effects of external changes very chancy," Kessler told the *Weekly*. "We've all been surprised by the continuing series of events in the 1990s. There seems no doubt that we are seeing slower climate signals change the nature of El Ninos. But whether those signals are global warming or something else is a matter of speculation at this point."

However, Kessler did speculate on how global warming might interact with El Nino to produce some quite spectacular effects. He took the example of tropical storms, which are one of the main devices used by the ocean-atmosphere system to disperse excess heat: "It is observed that tropical storms grow most strongly at sea surface temperatures (SSTs) above 27.5C. Changing the SST from, say, 24C to 26C has little effect on storm growth, but between 27C and 28C, the atmosphere changes dramatically. With the proper heating from below, storms boil up. At present, the area of the tropical Pacific with SST above 27C is more than 20 per cent larger than the area above 27.5C, so even a small general warming could greatly increase the area of ocean above the threshold. If this happens, then there could be big changes to the regional or global atmosphere. Therefore one might wonder if global warming could interact with El Nino through changing the area of warm SST. In that case, small changes in the background temperature (such as we see from year to year) might not have much effect, but a threshold could be crossed in which the background temperature of a large part of the tropical Pacific rose above 27.5C, and then a sudden change could occur". If it did, the consequences could be catastrophic, not just for the region, but for the whole world.

Kessler was at pains to stress that this example was merely speculation, and that the "non-linear" nature of the climate system means there could well be other, unforeseeable compensating changes, which would work to damp the whole thing down. Mike Davey of the UK Met Office is even more emphatic: "Global warming impact so far is weak", he told the *Weekly*. "Thus evidence connecting El Nino to global warming at this stage relies on future predictions using models complex enough to reproduce El Nino activity realistically. At present, to my knowledge at least, such evidence is mixed".

But for other scientists, such reticence induced by the sheer difficulty of adequately modelling the internal structure of an El Nino event is irrelevant. As Kevin Trenberth, head of the Climate Analysis Section at the National Council for Atmospheric Research in the US, told the *Weekly*: "Some of the theories treat El Nino as an instability in the climate system. Others treat it as chaotic/stochastic. But both of these overlook the reason why El Nino occurs in the first place. All the evidence points toward the fact that El Nino happens because if it didn't, heat would build up in the tropical Pacific. During El Nino, heat is pumped up into the atmosphere (producing a mini global warming) and, through changes in ocean currents, carried into higher latitudes of the ocean. Because it deals fundamentally with heat, global warming will interfere with and must change El Nino. It will also make its manifestations, in terms of floods and drought around the world, more severe."

Put like this, it seems obvious. And when this simple physical rationale is combined with the statistical record over the last twenty years, the evidence appears compelling that the collision of global warming with ENSO is not only an accident waiting to happen, but that it may well be happening now. So perhaps Kessler's "speculative" fantasy will turn out to be fact after all. Perhaps, as some say, it is a fact already, and what we are seeing in the West Pacific and beyond, this year and next, are the first fruits of global warming — not the "Club-Med-for-all" scenario of tabloid journalism, as the climate of the Loire valley slowly extends its langorous embrace towards the frigid suburbs of the Home Counties, but a world much stranger and more frightening than the one we live in now. A world of violent extremes and radical unpredictability, in which the natural cycles on which human life still depends, despite the invention of processed peas, duplicate sheep and genetically-engineered soya beans, are torn apart, limb from limb, before out very eyes.

The West Pacific warm pool where El Nino starts, and where all the surface water is above Kessler's magic figure of 27.5C, is larger, today, than it has been at any time in recorded history. So when will scientists decide that the warm pool is large enough to take it seriously? To start to do something about it?

THE 1991 UNEP MEETING concluded that an increase in ENSO's frequency and intensity would be prima facie evidence that El Nino was riding the wave of global warming. Since then much of the missing evidence has materialised; yet as facts have accumulated, and people have been exposed to fire, flood and famine, instead of gathering confidence, climatologists seem instead to have become more and more reluctant to accept the confirmation they had hoped for at face value. Instead, they have largely taken refuge in the ever greater complexities of modelling the ENSO event, or of refining their predictions of the moment of its onset and the course it will take. These are all very fine activities, doubtless inspired by the noblest of motives. But they seem out of place, to say the least, when the storm is about to break over your head.

One senior researcher, speaking to the *Weekly* on condition of anonymity, complained that every time new evidence shows up, his colleagues move the goal posts: "If one were to say: 'look for a big El Nino in 2000', and it happened, would that make a difference? Or if one were to say: 'Beware of the 7-year repetitive El Nino', or even, 'seven double-year El Ninos with only one year in between (21 years in all),' would that make a difference? Sure, both of these would probably convince everybody. But they are both tantamount to disaster. The question must be: is there a criterion we can all agree on this side of disaster?"

> *"To me, it's just like a pot on the fire. You think the heat is being distributed evenly, but there's always one part that heats up more quickly than the rest. That's what El Nino is — I believe that it's caused by global warming, and that it's just the first place, the very beginning of the effects which are going to be felt."*
>
> **Bekuretsion Kassahun, meteorologist and member of the official Ethiopian delegation to the Kyoto climate change conference, reported in the London *Independent* last week.**

If you surf through the dozens of web sites devoted to El Nino, you soon get an idea of the kind of disaster most people have in mind: trouble down at Malibu Beach tends to rank higher in the list of concerns than other people's range fires and famines. Most of these sites are funded and run by US government departments. Even the ones that are not rely on satellite imagery and forecasting technologies provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). These sites provide a more-or-less useful fire service, warning people mainly in North America of what may be coming their way in the near future. But of all the sites inspected by the *Weekly*, only one explicitly promised information on connections between global warming and El Nino. Alas, clicking on the links provided led only to pages providing information on *either* global warming, *or* El Nino; nothing on the two together. Either your correspondent misunderstood something, or these guys need to brush up their syntax.

When asked by e-mail where the missing connections were, a representative of NOAA replied: "The reason you won't find much information connecting El Nino and global warming is that we (meaning the mainstream scientific community) don't really have anything useful to say at this point". When pressed, he did however admit that "another reason is that scientists tend to shy away from questions that are so politically loaded. It [GW/El Nino] seems to mean nothing but trouble", before signing off: "The plain fact is that we don't know very well at all how El Nino and global warming could interact, and that is why you don't find the information you are looking for on the various web sites. At least most of us know enough to keep our mouths shut when we don't know something". Or when we know what's good for us?

Yet even this source did add: "All we can say is that it is unlikely that global warming would *not* have an effect on El Nino". Which, in a sense, says it all. After all, you don't need a degree in rocket science to see "how El Nino and global warming could interact", and you don't need to be Woodward and Bernstein to see how such an interaction might become politically "loaded" — so politically loaded, that all the "mainstream scientists" could wake up one morning to find they had drifted off into a little intraverted eddy all of their own.

The evidence suggests that El Nino may already have been driven out of its former equilibrium state and while, as any self-respecting "semi-cyclical" phenomenon would, it is doubtless even now searching for a new equilibrium, until it gets there, "chaos" would be a generous description of what we should expect en route. Some sources estimate that if the 1997/98 ENSO does turn out to have the double-impact for Southeast Asia that many experts are openly talking about, what we are facing is humanitarian catastrophe on a cataclysmic scale. Not merely the intensity of this event — possibly bigger than the "great dry" of the 1870s — but the rhythm of the build-up, which has meant that for almost a decade local ecosystems have had no time to recover properly before the next blow arrived, spell disaster for food security not only in the region, but further afield, wherever El Nino reaches. Parts of the Indonesian archipelago and Papua New Guinea are already staring famine in the face, and the government of the Philippines, which normally prides itself on its self-sufficiency, has begun to place orders for extra rice.

WHAT IF ANOTHER DROUGHT HITS Indonesia in six months' time? What if southern Africa and South America are hit again in quick succession? And what if everyone starts looking for food at the same time? As one commentator told the *Weekly*: "I know it's difficult to grasp, but it could be the case that a global lesson in the meaning of the term 'carrying capacity' is in the making".

In the meantime, people grasp at what they can. A meeting of the UN's International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in Geneva on 18 November, issued what was in many ways just another call to "wait and see" . On 2 December an emergency motion proposed by the G-77 and China was passed by the UN General Assembly, anticipating El Nino-induced world food shortages and famine and demanding immediate concerted action. How effective this intiative will be remains to be seen, when so many people are still in denial of the potential scale of the problem. Few international bureaucrats are likely to starve if famine strikes their part of the world, but they could very well lose their jobs by sticking their necks out and going against the institutional consensus. And they can always comfort themselves, faced with the consequences of their inaction, that whatever happened was, after all, only a "natural" disaster.

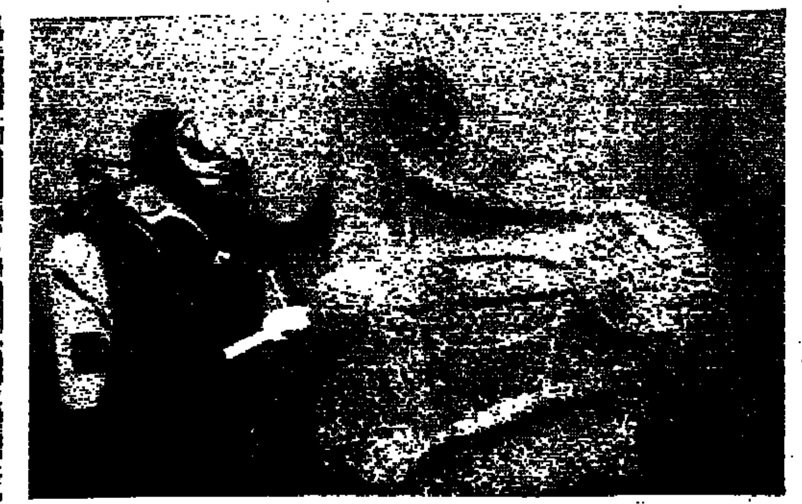
As for the science of El Nino, which suggests that there may be nothing at all natural about what is going on, the Kyoto climate change conference which finished last week did its best to skirt around the whole issue, despite forceful representations from certain of the countries that suffer most acutely from ENSO-related effects. But then, that's hardly surprising, given that ENSO research is dominated by the developed world, and more particularly by the military establishment, who have a near-monopoly on the hardware required (satellites, ever bigger computers) to collect data and construct models. As a result, almost all the science that wants to be taken "seriously" depends upon them: and scientists are nothing if not serious. Not that there's a conspiracy of silence: not at all. Who needs one? As one veteran diplomat (who asked not to be named) told the *Weekly*: "El Nino is a very very sensitive issue in the US. So much so, that to admit that its recent behaviour was the result of global warming, and that in turn the result of large domestic CO_2 emissions, would be a fundamental contradiction in the national consciousness."

Another commentator, also speaking on condition of anonymity, was even more blunt: "The question of global hegemony depends directly on "cheap" oil and the avoidance of pollution penalties. If the number one power had to operate according to the even-now-prevailing attitude regarding an appropriate price for oil to compensate for global warming effects, it would immediately slip from first place. In that sense, the difference in the price of a gallon of gasoline in Italy, say, and the same gallon 'elsewhere', is the margin of advantage preserved by some people in maintaining global hegemony. It is that difference in realised social cost or outlay vis-à-vis the available energy per gallon of gas or oil that allows the ready projection of power." If you want to push the rest of the world around, you have to have something to push with. Unfortunately, for the moment, as far as the last great superpower is concerned, the advantages of global hegemony seem to outweigh the necessity of survival.

SO PERHAPS NOW WE KNOW: El Nino — and what it may become — is simply the price we have to pay for McDonald's and the nutrient-free junk democracy that goes with it. George Aditjondro, former chairman of Walhi, Indonesia's leading environmental watchdog, may have been more right than he knew when he called this year's El Nino-fanned fires "the worst ecological disaster to have hit Asia since the Vietnam War." Last week, the US magnanimously agreed to a 6 per cent cut in CO_2 emissions by the year 2010 — on condition it could fake the records by buying up unused emissions quotas from elsewhere, most probably from the former Soviet Union. That's what I call winning the Cold War. But the war today is over heat, not cold, and it's a war we're all losing. The South Pacific may seem a long way away from Beirut or Berlin, but it isn't really. Recent research shows that ENSO may be responsible for droughts in the Middle East, as well as this summer's disastrous floods in Central Europe. When finally that storm comes in your window, just remember who you have to thank for keeping the world safe for catastrophe.

Two hundred years after the French began to "explore" Egypt, **Nevine El-Aref** set off in search of the memories they left behind, whether in architecture or archaeology





French archaeological activities in Egypt range from wall paintings in monasteries to offshore activities in Alexandria

Cairo's French legacy

When Napoleon Bonaparte arrived in Egypt in 1798 he established a military and a cultural headquarters in Cairo, the former located in Azbakiya, and the latter based in several areas where the spirit of France still lingers, in one form or another.

Among these are Haret (alley) Monge, a small alleyway near the Mosque of Al-Sayeda Zenab, named after the famous French mathematician who headed the scientific committee that accompanied Napoleon's expedition; Beit El-Sennari in Haret Monge, which became the headquarters of the scholars working on the publication of the famous French orientalist work *Description de L'Egypte*; Mahatet El-Faransawi ("French Station") in Old Cairo, where a magnificent palace became the cultural meeting place for such artists and writers as Chateaubrilland and Saint-Simoniens, the latter of whom first raised the idea of digging a canal to link the Red Sea with the Mediterranean; as well as the El-Faransawi (the French) Mosque, and the mausoleum of Mohamed Talaat El-Faransawi (Mohamed Talaat the Frenchman), both in Old Cairo, which are now tucked in a small garden and are the only remains of a once essentially French area of Cairo.

"Beit El-Sennari is now under restoration by a Franco-Egyptian mission," said Abdalla El-Attar, head of the Islamic and Coptic department at the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). "It was the palace of Ibrahim El-Sennari, a Mameluke of Sudanese origin," he added.

Next-door to Beit El-Sennari, in what is today the El-Saneya School for Girls, was the house of Hassan El-Kashef, a Circassian Mameluke. "It was sequestered by the French. Thirty six French scholars used it as their permanent headquarters during the French campaign," said Soliman Hozzayen, general director of the Egyptian Institute.

"Later the Institute continued its work in France and when they returned to Egypt they were at first active in a Mameluke house in Alexandria until 1857, and then moved to various palaces in Cairo. Today's headquarters of the Institute is in Tahrir Square opposite the Ewert Memorial Hall of the American University in Cairo] where research is still being carried out in archaeology, art, culture, science and history," said Hozzayen, who stressed that the locations might be different, but French involvement with Ancient Egyptian culture has been continuous.

Haret Monge symbolises the first cultural contact between France and Egypt because it is there, in the Al-Sayeda Zenab area in Cairo, that the first scientific committee that accompanied Napoleon's expedition assembled. There, artists, cartographers and historians made contact with Egyptians. This led Mohamed Ali later to recognise the importance of sending young Egyptians on scholarships abroad, many of them to France.

Drink the waters of the Nile and you will always return, the saying goes, and Octave Joseph de Seves was certainly one Frenchman who bore this prophecy out. He originally accompanied the French campaign, but returned later to convert to Islam, marry a Muslim woman, and build a magnificent palace known as Soliman Pasha El-Fransawi (Soliman Pasha the Frenchman"), in the area now called Mahatet Al-Faransawi.

All that survives today is the small mosque still known as El-Faransawi Mosque and the mausoleum of Mohamed Talaat Al-Faransawi, a commander in Mohamed Ali's army. His original name was Mohamed Abduh, but all reference to it on the mausoleum has been destroyed.

Other areas of Cairo also remind us of Egypt's French legacy. For example, in front of the Catholic Cathedral in the Cairo district of Daher, a street lined with ceramics and car repair shops is named after Linant de Bellefonds, the engineer who supervised the construction of the barrage north of Cairo.

"He was one of the technicians who helped Mohamed Ali achieve his ambition in the field of development," said Egyptian intellectual Kamel Zoheiri. In downtown Cairo, in the area of the Television Building on the Corniche, the three famous French Egyptologists Champollion, Mariette and Maspero have given their names to streets, "and, more recently, Murad Street in Giza was renamed Charles de Gaulle Street following the French president's support of Gamal Abdel-Nasser after his confrontation with Israel in June 1967," said Zoheiri.

In Champollion's footsteps

The extraordinary cultural richness and variety of Egypt astonished the French archaeologists, artists and architects who accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt in 1798. They were fascinated by all they saw, ancient and modern, but perhaps nothing as much as the Ancient Egyptian civilisation. They documented monuments that have today disappeared, and the records they made show the remarkable progress achieved since then in the excavation, study, documentation and restoration of Egypt's ancient heritage.

The work of French scholars has had a profound impact in the field of Egyptology. Among the most famous names are Jean François Champollion, who deciphered hieroglyphics from the famous Rosetta Stone, thus succeeding in breaking the centuries-old silence of the monuments; Auguste Mariette, who originally came to Egypt to purchase Coptic manuscripts for the Louvre but ended up abandoning his mission and devoting his life to Pharaonic antiquities; and Gaston Maspero, who introduced the idea of having a permanent French scientific mission in Cairo.

"Instead of shipping antiquities out of the country, Mariette tabled a law which led to the protection of monuments and put an end to the widespread exportation of priceless antiquities," said Jean-Pierre Corteggiani, scientific and technical head of the French Institute for Oriental Studies in Egypt (IFAO), who explained that Mariette's commitment to Egypt came about when he started excavations in Saqqara and discovered the Serapeum, the remarkable mausoleum devoted to Apis bulls. "He also founded the Antiquities Service (*Service des Antiquités*) — now the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) — and was responsible for founding the first museum, then in the Cairo suburb of Bulaq, in 1858," continued Corteggiani. The museum was moved to Giza in 1890 and then transferred to its present location in Cairo's Tahrir Square in 1902.

"Mariette excavated all over Egypt, in Tanis, Edfu and Karnak to mention but a few, and when he died in 1881, his work continued," said Corteggiani. "Gaston Maspero, his disciple and successor, was as active as his mentor. He was the first director of the IFAO, founded in 1898," he added.

French archaeological activity covered the whole of Egypt. At Karnak, Egyptologist and architect Henri Chevrier was responsible for reconstructing the great Hypostyle Hall where many of the columns had toppled and the pylons were in ruins; Jean Philippe Lauer worked at Saqqara for 30 years, devoting his life to what he regarded as one of the most important monuments of Egypt, Zoser's Step Pyramid Complex. And since the French Institute's prime concern has been to document texts, French archaeologists also worked at famous archaeological sites such as Philae, Kom-Ombo, Esna and Tel El-Amarna.

As early as the 1920's the Institute was excavating lesser-known sites as well. They discovered the Middle Kingdom necropolis at Meir, excavated in Assiut and, in the area of Abu-Rawash north of Giza, found the Pyramid of Radjedef. One of their most noteworthy activities has been the excavation and study of the Workers' Village at Deir-El-Medina, where the artisans who worked in the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings lived for eight successive generations and where remarkable information of their everyday life has come to light.

Nor was the Christian period forgotten by the French. Mariette may have been diverted from Coptic texts to Pharaonic antiquities, but not his successors. Since the 1960s a French mission has been excavating hundreds of early Christian hermitages in Kellia, west of the town of Damanhur in the Delta and, according to Corteggiani, has also restored and published catalogues of the wall paintings at the monasteries of Wadi El- Natrun, Esna, and the White and Red monasteries in Sohag.

With its permanent headquarters in the Cairo district of Munira, the French Institute has its own publishing house, publishing over 20 archaeological and scientific works per year, and also houses photographic and epigraphical surveys archives. The Institute also has restoration and preservation facilities.

The French Institute naturally collaborates with the SCA, offering technical and scientific expertise whenever possible, and with other archaeological missions in Egypt. For example, at Karnak, the Franco-Egyptian mission is continuing work begun more than two decades ago; a Franco-Polish mission is restoring the chapel of Hathor at Deir El-Bahri, a Franco-Swiss mission (Geneva University) is working in Abu Rawash, and in El-Fayoum, a Franco-Italian mission (Milan University) has discovered a complete Graeco-Roman city at Tebtunis. In the Western Desert, the French have been active in Dush, south of Kharga Oasis, and in Balat in Dakhla Oasis. In Istable Antar, in the first Arab capital of Fustat, they have been active in working on an Abbasid mosque and five large Fatimid mausoleums.

Napoleon's learned scholars might have been fascinated by all aspects of life in Egypt, both ancient and modern, but today's French scholars have gone one step further: in 1996 they stepped off the mainland in Alexandria in one of a series of diving missions which have resulted in the discovery of relics of "Hellenistic Alexandria" beneath the sea.

Travellers with a mission

Young people, Egyptians and foreigners alike, are more than ready to help boost Egypt's image and they have their own particular ways of doing so. **Sherine Nasr** looks into a new promotional bid

"Who other than young people can best carry out the task of promoting Egypt, both home and abroad? They are enthusiastic, creative; cultural barriers do not hinder them and, above all, they are travel fans," said Mahmoud Shafik of the media department of the Supreme Council of Youth and Sports. These unique qualities qualify the young to play an effective role in promoting tourism in Egypt, and they are being encouraged to do so.

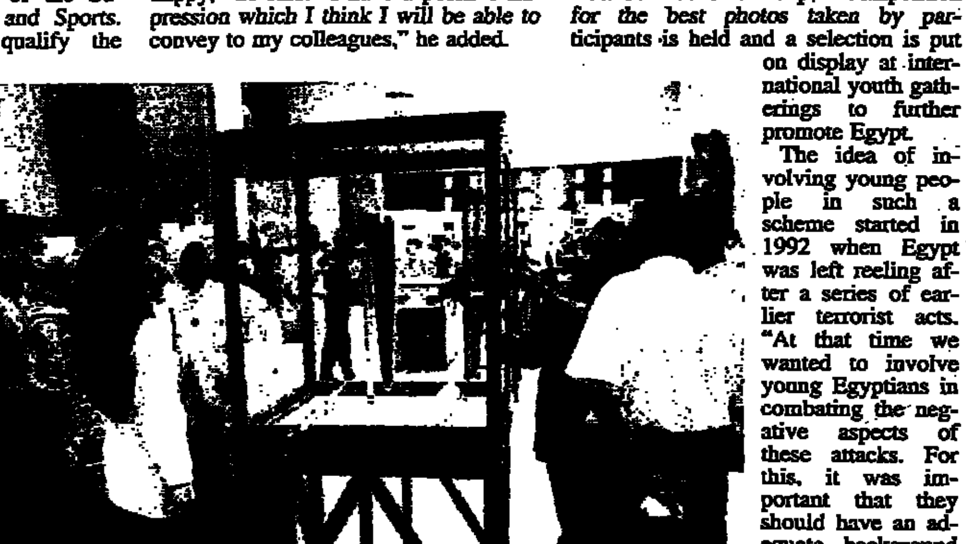
Undeterred by the unhappy event in Luxor last month, international youth organisations have stressed that they will continue to bring groups of young travellers to Egypt as a positive step towards condemning violence worldwide.

Simultaneously, the Council will continue to send young Egyptians on cultural tours to encourage them to play a more active role in tourism promotion.

Cultural and tourist exchange between Egypt and European and Arab countries has been taking place for years, and every effort is being made to ensure it continues. "Every year, we receive thousands of school and university students and young workers from France, Italy, Germany and Finland. We also maintain very strong relations with Kuwait, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain," said Shafik.

The programmes for groups from abroad combine culture and entertainment in a single package. "During the two-week trip visitors encounter Egypt's wealth of tourist destinations and, at the same time, can enjoy swimming at seaside resorts and joining safari tours," Shafik said. "This winter, more emphasis will be put on Luxor and Aswan so that young travellers from abroad can come to their own conclusions about conditions and the safety of travellers," said Shafik.

Eric Burge, a university student from Finland, is one of many who see Luxor as a "tourist-friendly" city. "It is charming. I think that what happened was an exception because the city is specially equipped to make a visitor happy," he said. "I have a positive impression which I think I will be able to convey to my colleagues," he added.



Young Egyptians coming face to face with their heritage *photo: Ayman Ibrahim*

Meanwhile, the "winter schedule" for Egyptian youngsters is now in place. Groups of university and school students are taken on trips to Upper Egypt, Nuweiba, Sharm El-Sheikh, Alexandria and other destinations throughout the country.

Despite the Luxor tragedy, trains are carrying thousands of young Egyptians to visit the archaeological sites in Luxor and Aswan each week. Half will stay in Luxor while the rest proceed to Aswan. After three days the groups switch places. This year, however, they realise that they are not simply enjoying a domestic trip. There are other tasks to perform. "We are carrying a message of peace and friendship to young people of all nations," one young Egyptian traveller said.

Those visiting Luxor and Aswan will attend the sound and light performances in both cities, visit the temples on the west bank at Luxor, the High Dam in Aswan and the temples of Philae.

They are always accompanied by professional tourist guides, usually stay at youth hostels and attend lectures on topical issues such as quality services, tourist promotion and environmental health care. "Each participant is charged a nominal fee of only LE20," said Shafik.

At the end of the trip, a competition for the best photos taken by participants is held and a selection is put on display at international youth gatherings to further promote Egypt.

The idea of involving young people in such a scheme started in 1992 when Egypt was left reeling after a series of earlier terrorist acts. "At that time we wanted to involve young Egyptians in combating the negative aspects of these attacks. For this, it was important that they should have an adequate background on Egypt's cultural, historical and touristic heritage," said Shafik. "These are not simply recreational trips but excursions with a mission."

So far, some 250,000 youngsters have toured Egypt with the domestic travel programme. "Those chosen to participate usually have a historical, political or athletic background. They attend lectures by experts on how to approach tourists, provide small services for them, how to behave responsibly in archaeological areas and how to respect nature. In short, all those actions that convey a civilised image to foreigners at home and abroad," said Shafik.

When young Egyptian travellers visit these different areas they bring extra business to the tourist markets. "Merchants and shopowners wait for the train's arrival and departure. True, the interests of these young travellers are different from those of foreign visitors — maybe more in the line of buying peanuts, henna and herbs than imitation antiquities — but they keep the market active nevertheless," said Shafik.

Winter packages

What's on?

Most Egyptian hotels are now offering special packages for Egyptians and foreign residents:

Sharm El-Sheikh

Marriott Beach Resort offers single or double rooms for LE275 per night including service, taxes and buffet breakfast. The offer is valid until 22 December and subject to availability.

Conrad International offers double rooms for LE125 per person including buffet breakfast, service, taxes and special discounts on food and beverages. The offer is valid until 25 January except between 24 December 1997 and 3 January 1998.

Pyramisa offers double rooms for LE135 per person including taxes and buffet breakfast.

Cataract offers double rooms for LE85 per person on a bed and breakfast basis. The offer is valid until 28 January excluding the period from 22 December to 3 January.

Sofitel Hotel offers double rooms for LE125 per person and single rooms for LE200 on a bed and breakfast basis including taxes and service charges. The offer is valid from 3 to 23 December and from 3 to 28 January.

Sonesta Sharm Beach Resort offers double rooms for LE220 on a bed and breakfast basis including 50 percent discounts for water sport facilities and inclusive of taxes and service. The offer excludes peak periods of feasts and the New Year.

Red Sea

Conrad International Hurghada offers double rooms for LE100 per person including buffet breakfast, service, taxes and special discounts on food and beverages. If you book three days you will get the fourth free. This offer is valid until 25 January except from 24 December until 3 January 1998.

Hurghada Intercontinental Resort offers double rooms for LE121 per person on half board basis. A single supplement will cost LE69 and triple room will be for LE95. Package valid till 25 January and subject to space availability.

Hurghada Marriott Beach Resort offers single or double rooms for LE235 including service, taxes and buffet breakfast. The offer is valid until 22 December and subject to availability. From 23-27 December there is a special Christmas package which includes a minimum stay of four nights in a double room, breakfast buffet and dinner buffet on the 24th, free of service charge and taxes, for LE988.

Hurghada Cataract offers double rooms for LE59 per person on bed and breakfast basis. The offer is valid until 28 January excluding the period from 22 December to 3 January.

Hotel Sofitel Hurghada offers double rooms for LE160 per person or single rooms for LE170 on half board basis including taxes and service charge. The offer is valid from 3 to 23 December and from 3 to 28 January.

Sonesta Hurghada Beach Resort offers double rooms for LE185 on bed and breakfast basis including taxes and service charges. The offer excludes peak periods of feasts and the New Year.

Windsor Zafarana offers rooms for LE135 per person on half board basis including service charge and taxes. The offer is valid till 6 March excluding feasts.

Holiday Inn Resort at Safaga offers double rooms for LE110 per person on half board basis. The offer is valid until 27 January 1998.

Luxor

Sonesta St George offers double rooms for LE85 on bed and breakfast basis including taxes and service charge. There will also be 25 per cent discount on dinner and laundry.

Pyramisa Isis offers double rooms for LE100 per person on bed and breakfast basis including service and taxes.

Alexandria

Romance offers double suites for LE87 on bed and breakfast basis inclusive of service, taxes and continental breakfast. The offer is valid from 1 December to 31 May. For single accommodation the cost will be LE145 per night all inclusive on bed and continental breakfast basis.

Nile cruises

Pyramisa offers a trip for LE295 including full board accommodation and sightseeing.

With the approach of the Christmas and the New Year, hotels are celebrating the events in their own special ways. Take your choice:

Cairo

In Marquis 'Take Away' in **Swissôtel El-Salam,** ginger bread, shortbread, sugar and chocolate cookies will be served from 12 December to 25. On Christmas Eve, Marquis Restaurant will be offering a buffet dinner with an array of dishes from all over the world. Meanwhile Aida Italian Restaurant will offer a set menu including salads, sea food and the finest cuts of meat.

On Christmas Day, Christmas lunch and dinner will be served at the Marquis Restaurant accompanied by the melodies of the Italian duet "Anita & Fabrizio".

On New Year's Eve a romantic candle-light dinner will be prepared at Aida Italian Restaurant. But for those who prefer dancing and singing, an exciting gala dinner-dance buffet, with live band and folkloric show, go to the Marquis.

The Nile Hilton is having a Christmas Eve dinner at the Rotisserie Belvedere, and Da Mario restaurants, and a Christmas Eve buffet at the Ibis Café. There will also be a Christmas Day brunch at the Rotisserie Belvedere with choir. On Christmas Day there will be a buffet in the Ibis Cafe.

At El-Gezira Sheraton, a lavish Christmas gala candle-light dinner will be served on 24 December in "Rumours" Piano Bar for LE250. At El-Andalus Café on 24 December there will be a special Christmas dinner buffet for LE85. On 25 December, Christmas lunch will be served with live entertainment. On 31 December at El-Kebabgy Restaurant, you can sample the real taste of *kebab*, *mezza* and oriental food along with a special menu for LE85.

A New Year's Eve gala dinner with live entertainment featuring the Shadow Band will be held at the El-Andalus, but for those who prefer to spend New Year's Eve in the open, the terrace overlooking the Nile will offer a "One Thousand and One Nights" gala dinner, a combination of exquisite cuisine and a panoramic view of the Nile.

At the Semiramis Intercontinental, Christmas Eve can be spent enjoying an elegant dinner accompanied by jazz in The Grill. While, in Haroun El-Rashid Ballroom, a party with the most famous Egyptian and Arab singers like Hakim, Simon and Camilia, will be held.

In the Felucca Brasserie, a lavish Christmas dinner buffet with winter specialties from around the world will be served. But, if you prefer the Mexican way, then Los Amigos is the right place for you, for there you can celebrate Christmas Eve with a special live show, and Karaoke along with the latest hits.

In Cleopatra Ball Room there will be the most exciting programmes featuring star performers, singers and belly dancers.

On New Year's Eve, The Grill will be serving an elegant dinner with French cuisine accompanied by music and jazz.

In Haroun El-Rashid Ballroom a New Year *Sohour*-style party will be held featuring performances by the most famous Egyptian and Arab singers like Khaled Haggag, Badea El-Maghrebiya and Ehab Tawfik.

Cleopatra Ballroom will be featuring its famous "*Fawanees* tent" with special night-long entertainment and an oriental *sohour* before dawn.

Compiled by ***Rehab Saad***

هكذا من الأصل



First Peter Nicol knocked him off his perch. Now Ahmed Barada has stuck the boot in at the Heliopolis Open. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** watches a world champion get well and truly squashed

What's the racket about? Barada's dream comes true as Jansher Khan, the world number 1, crumples up under the Egyptian's onslaught

Yesterday's Khan?

One day it had to happen. Last Friday, for the first time ever, Egypt's Ahmed Barada beat the world's top-ranked squash player Jansher Khan of Pakistan. The scene was the Heliopolis Chrysler Open. This is the third defeat Jansher has suffered this year. Yet of the two players who have so far proved his match, the one most likely to claim the title for himself is Peter Nicol.

Turning-30 this year seems to have taken its toll on the eight-times world title holder. He was beaten for the first time in years by Peter Nicol in the final of the Al-Ahram International in June, and then again in the Mahindra Open in Bombay last month. Since Jansher did not participate in the World Cup in Malaysia this year, and has now failed to defend his first place in the Heliopolis Chrysler Open here in Cairo, it is expected that by the beginning of January, the new world rankings will put Nicol top of the list. Jansher is expected to slip into second place, while Barada will move up the ranking to fifth from seventh.

For Barada, defeating Jansher was one of his dreams. Now he has achieved that, the only place left to go is up. When Nicol defeated Jansher in the final of Al-Ahram, he remarked, "I worked hard for this," and it seems he has been working even harder since to make sure Jansher surrenders his first place in the world rankings. But will Jansher take defeat lying down? I wouldn't bank on it, even now that Barada has clinched the Heliopolis Open at his expense. Since winning his first world title, Jansher has been determined to keep on winning it, at least until he broke Jhanagir Khan's record of seven times. Now Jansher has made the record eight. In all that time, he has rarely lost a match, until this year when Nicol at last proved his undoing.

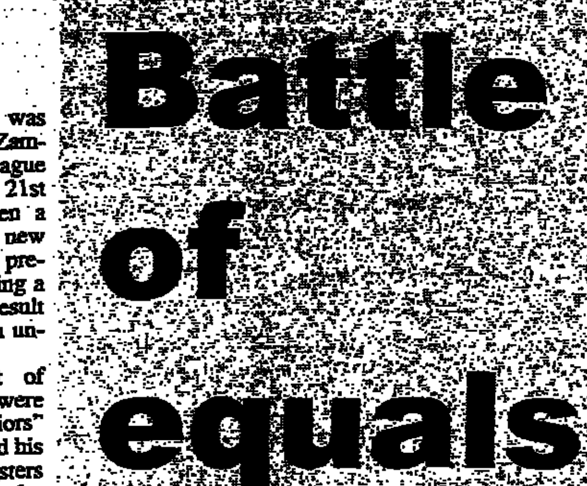
Robert Edward, the Professional Squash Association official presenter who was the announcer at the Heliopolis Open, said, "Jansher may be suffering a combination of bad luck together with unfavourable circumstances, but that does not mean he will not fight back."

On many occasions, Jansher has said that although he may be getting older, that only means he now has the experience as well as the talent. When he was asked who he thinks will be his successor as the leading player in the world, he would not give a name, adding that he was not yet ready to give up the title. After his match against Barada which he lost 15-12, 7-15, 12-15, 8-15, Jansher said that his opponent had earned his victory through his great fighting spirit. That Barada won in his home country is true, but it is also true that Jansher was obviously not on his best form. It appears that Jansher already wants to put 1997 behind him and concentrate on getting 1998 right. If not, he might have to put up more of a fight himself.

The British Open is just around the corner and will provide the true test of the relative standings of the three great rivals. The results of the British Open will also determine to a great extent who will be named world no 1 for 1997. Then it's on into 1998 and the next World Professional Squash Association Super Series.

Meanwhile, on a more local level, 18-year-old Amr Shabana, who lost to Barada in the semi-finals, is proving time after time that if there is anyone fit to follow in Barada's footsteps, he is the man. The boy is so talented and has drawn effusive praise from the international referees and World Squash Association officials who were attending the Heliopolis Open. They described him as a sensitive player with brilliant reactions. Shabana will be yet another Egyptian to keep an eye on in both the junior and senior events of the British Open.

Battle of equals



In front of 60,000 spectators, Ahli and Zamalek met for the 80th time since league football began in Egypt, only to draw 0-0. Surprising? Not really. But at least one set of fans were more than happy with the scoreline. **Abeer Anwar** issued the following minority report





Nil-nil — again? This was the 80th time Ahli and Zamalek have met in the league tournament, and the 21st time the result has been a draw. So nothing much new there. But that did not prevent this match from being a strange one, even if the result was statistically far from unusual.

Ahli were confident of beating Zamalek who were fielding their new "juniors" team. But Ruud Kroll and his white-shirted youngsters came out fighting, determined to prove themselves and show Ahli they are no easy prey. Most of Zamalek's older stars, such as Ismail Youssef, were not even on the bench. Indeed, Youssef, their most experienced player, is now their former captain, since he decided to retire after winning the Afro-Asian Championship. "I want to end my career as a player right now when Zamalek is winning. I am sure the team has a number of stars they can depend on."

During the first half of the match, both sides were playing defensively and the pace was slow. Strangely, given this softly-softly approach, two players — one from each side — still managed to have themselves sent off after only 17 minutes for bad behaviour. They were Medhat Abdel-Hadi and Ahmed Ragab, both of whom will miss their teams' next two games. As a result, the two teams were even more tense when they found themselves down to 10 men with 72 minutes still to go. But this situation seemed to suit the young Zamalek players who were able to demonstrate their skill, raining strong shots in on Ahli's goal. Mohamed Sabry, man of the match for Zamalek, even came close to scoring early in the first half, but just managed to hit the woodwork. Sabry gave a wonderful performance, despite an injury for which he had to make regular trips to the sidelines to recieve treatment.

Both Ahli and Zamalek missed two good chances of scoring at the beginning of the match. Zamalek's goalkeeper, Nader El-Sayed, was able to block two strong shots just in time. Meanwhile, Ali Maher, Ahli's star, was unable to make up for the absence of the disgraced Ahmed Ragab so he did not appear in his usual level. The initial over-confidence of the "Ahlawia" broke against the rock of Zamalek's enthusiasm and young blood. Indeed, were it not for the absence of their best goal scorer, Ruud Kroll's novices would easily have scored a brace of goals, or more.

In the second half, Ahli began to reorganise themselves so they could play a more aggressive role in the game, but Zamalek were determined to keep a clean sheet. Zamalek were keen to score, too, but Ahli's goalkeeper, Essam El-Hadari, kept his eyes open and proved well equal to the challenge.

The "Zamalkawia" seemed more than satisfied with the result. The same could not be said of the "Ahlawia", who had seen their dreams upset. But perhaps those who were happiest with the afternoon's performance were the security men, for whom both sets of fans seemed to have decided to be on their best behaviour. With this draw, Ahli go top of the league with 23 points, but Zamalek are not far behind with 19.

Elsewhere, there were some more surprising results, as Mahalla astounded everyone by beating Ismaili 1-0, leaving Ismaili level with Zamalek on 19 points, while Dina turned the tables on Qena, trouncing them 4-0 at home. But others as well as Ahli had to settle for a draw: Suez with Alex's Ittihad 0-0, Masri with Baladiat El-Mahalla 2-2 and Aswan with Mansoura 1-1.

The spirit on their side

CONACAF may sound like the kind of instant coffee you wouldn't force on even your mother-in-law, but behind the acronym lurks some unpredictable, but potentially exciting teams for the 1998 World Cup

Jamaica:

Brazilian coach Renee Somoe brought in four "passport" Jamaicans from the English leagues midway through the qualifying rounds: forwards Deon Burton of Derby County, Paul Hall of Portsmouth and Robbie Earle of Wimbeldon, and midfielder Fitzroy Simpson of Portsmouth. The transfusion was viewed with scepticism by some outside the West Indies, but it worked, revitalising a team that had started the final round with a less than inspiring record of 0-2-2.

The "Reggae boyz" went on to win three and draw three of their last six matches, but the critics were still not impressed. They tallied two or more goals only once in their final 10 qualifiers, being outscored 12-7 overall. But who cares about numbers, when you've got the spirit on your side?

Mexico:

Mexico are still the major power in the region, but must now regroup under coach Manuel Lapuente, who replaced Bora Milutinovic after the latter was dismissed on November 25. While they started out strongly, the Mexicans closed with three draws which put their pretention to tower over the rest of their group into perspective.

Previously, Mexico City had never seen as much as a draw in a World Cup qualifying match; now it had to deal with draws in consecutive weeks at Azteca. First it was 0-0 against the United States on November 2, after playing the last 58 minutes a man down, and then 3-3 against Costa Rica a week later. Another 0-0 draw with Jamaica in Kingston to round off the qualifying stage was the last nail in Milutinovic's coffin.

This will be Mexico's 11th appearance in the finals, but it has never in the past got beyond the second round, except when playing at home in 1970 and 1986.

The United States:

After a less than glamorous beginning, the United States closed impressively, finishing only a point behind Mexico. But a 1-1 draw at home against Jamaica on October 3 still rankles in some minds, especially that of Federation President Alan Rothenberg, and at first led to now fading speculation that coach Steve Sampson would be fired.

Major league soccer appears to have paid a dividend already, giving Sampson some experience and depth that the Americans have not had in the last two World Cups. But the coach still needs to settle on a line-up and get the Americans to play consistently as a unit.

Hands off our handball!

European countries are launching a campaign to transfer the upcoming World Men's Handball Championship in 1999 out of Egypt until the security situation is deemed stable. **Inas Mazhar** was up in arms when she approached the secretary-general of the International Handball Federation in Berlin

In a powerful and thrilling final, Denmark defeated Norway 33-20 to win the Women's World Handball Championship which ended in Berlin last Sunday. Germany, the hosts, were third after beating Russia 27-25. Korea came fifth after a 32-23 victory over Croatia, while a 36-34 triumph over Poland secured for Macedonia the seventh place.

However, despite such thrills and spills, there was more than just handball going on during the two-week event, which was held from 30 November to 14 December. Speculation was rife as to the possibility of Egypt being deprived of the World Championship for Men which it was due to host in 1999, because of the Luxor massacre.

Most of the European nations, and especially Hungary, Spain, Germany, Macedonia, Switzerland, and the Scandinavians, have threatened to boycott the championship if the International Handball Federation (IHF) insists on going ahead with plans to hold the tournament in Egypt.

Though there is still one and a half years to go before the tournament kicks off in June 1999, the Europeans are no longer enthusiastic about a journey to the valley of the Nile.

Secretary-general of the IHF, Raymond Hahn, said that so far nothing has changed and Egypt is still the official organiser of the next Men's World championship, unless it withdraws its offer. "However," he added, "the Europeans are afraid, and they have the right to be. The massacre that took place in Luxor last month and before it the attack outside the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square in Cairo, have made everyone afraid, and turned people against the idea of holding the tournament in Egypt until everything has calmed down again."

"The IHF is in a difficult situation," he explained. "What can we do about this? If only one country or two decide to boycott the championship, then there is no problem. We can tell them to stay home and replace them with other nations instead. But if there are any more than that, then this is a problem. We can't force them to participate in the championship in Egypt in such a situation. We have to respect their feelings and fears. We know that terrorism is to be found all over the world, but there have been two incidents in Egypt in less than three months."

Altogether, there should be 24 nations (divided into four groups of six) participating in the two-week event.

"Meanwhile, we are going to see if there are any candidates who would like to host the event instead of Egypt in '99, as a substitute, in case we decide to move the tournament, because we cannot bank on nothing happening in the coming one and half years, and we can't wait till just months before the tournament to go looking for a replacement country," Hahn added.

He also confirmed that there is no criticism implied of Egypt or the Egyptians themselves, nor of the organisation of Egyptian handball. Egypt has already successfully hosted two previous world events: the 1993 world juniors championship, and the world-selection team match against Egypt in 1994.

Dr Hassan Moustafa, president of the Egyptian Handball Federation, remains very keen that the tournament should come to Egypt. He has been making every effort to convince Egypt's opponents that the situation in Egypt is not a problem, that adequate security measures will be provided, and that there is nothing to worry about.

What the outcome will be remains unclear. The only thing that is clear is that some Europeans are so afraid of other people's terrorism, that they can become quite incapable of rational decision-making.

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18 - 24 December 1997



photo: Randa Shaath

Hassan Abbas Zaki:

He is 80, but a paragon of rectitude. No hidden fountain of youth though. The magic of numbers? Maybe

Immaterial means

He *does not strike one as a man who cares much* for images. There is a sense of laissez-faire — a dervish's attitude, some have called it — hiding much acumen. If he exercises, it is in the confines — despite *its spacious walls* — of his home. Back and forth, some twenty or thirty times, he walks. He thrives on little sleep. He could have been a doctor, smitten with the power of healing, a guru of alternative medicine. Or a sufi, seeking a remedy for body and soul. Instead, he is an economist. Numbers, too, have their magic.

He has steered through the world of finance. On the periphery, politics; but this was never his main concern.

The curriculum vitae is impressive. He was minister of economy during the crucial years of growth, from 1965 to 1972. He was the man who, as the sole advisor to Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed from 1972 to 1985, *empathised* with the aspirations of this "remarkable prince, a modest yet courageous man *who was proud of his* values as a Bedouin, yet wanted his country to be a modern one with a special role — peaceful, non-belligerent".

In the home, relics are scattered about, ivory knickknacks of finesse and cunning: a Japanese sphere, with a ball carved from within. In two large frames, fragments of the silk covering of the Ka'ba in Mecca, given to him by King Faisal.

Today, a major figure in the world of finance, he is one of the true movers and shakers. He disagrees with those who advocate excessive, indiscriminate liberalisation of strategic sectors of the economy and the dissemination of a very alien market culture.

He continues to be involved in almost every sector of the economy: banking, the stock exchange, hotels and insurance, voicing views born of long experience.

If privatisation means foreign ownership of banks and insurance companies, he opposes it staunchly. These institutions are now on the World Trade Organisation's *agenda for liberalisation*. But they are major assets, he says, won over to the economy by nationalisation forty years ago and the economy's backbone today. He had a hand in nationalisation himself, but his caution is no mere digging in of the heels.

"I am dead against privatisation by selling assets to foreigners. If we need to modernise our companies, our banks, then we can send people abroad to gain the expertise, but you do not sell your assets, your source of national savings to foreigners. You need banks to build portfolios, to help your stock market function. There are very real dangers here, like the United States' attempts to enforce its *automotive* industry on Japan, in defiance of the WTO's directives."

A member of the Central Bank of Egypt's (CBE) board of directors, he opposed the issuing of General Depository Receipts *(GDRs)* on the *international* stock exchange, which would increase foreign shares in, and control of, national banks and companies. "Two months ago, the board finally decided that *no new GDRs would* be issued unless first approved by the CBE," he says with satisfaction.

He headed the Suez Canal negotiation committee, which undertook talks with the British over the liberation of Egyptian assets frozen in the wake of the Canal's nationalisation in 1956.

On this nationalisation, he has no impassioned speeches to make, merely coolly delivered facts: "Egypt provided Britain with the resources for the second World War: soldiers, food and clothing," *he says. "But the prices paid for these did* not rise, because there was a fixed exchange rate for the Egyptian pound, valuated at 97 and a half piastres per sterling pound. The Egyptian pound *actually* equalled *three sterling pounds. This* caused a great loss to the economy. The nationalisation of foreign assets ten years later regained for Egypt only a small portion of what it had paid during the war. I say this to all those who criticise the nationalisations of the late fifties. Before nationalisation, foreign banks had other priorities; their deposits went to Europe and they imported commodities. They did not build industries. Foreign banks here carried an umbrella when it rained in Europe, even though in Egypt, the sun was shining."

In the other room is a library packed with books. He donated over ten thousand tomes to Dar Al-Kutub: history, sufism, astrology, the occult and health care.

He offers mint chocolates. His journey into sufism started early, by chance, at the age of eleven, when he happened upon Avicenna and Al-Farabi. Today, he is concerned that sufism should be understood in its essence, "that it is the mean — the middle road advocated by religion, elevated to its utmost". He heads the society he *formed for this purpose. Among its members:* Tarek El-Bishri, a prominent judge and author of writings on Islamic law and history and Mohamed Emara, an Islamic thinker and academic. *He is a member of Al-Azhar's Islamic* Research Council and of many other religious institutions, wrote a preface to one edition of Al-Shafie's *Al-Umm*. He is a board member of the Young Mus*lim Men's Association. He has formed and heads* a society for the mentally disabled.

It matters little to him that he has gone straight on to all the things that would detract one from the world of the spirit: success, status and wealth. "There is a saying that some have money in their heart. But a man can keep his money in his pocket, and have God in his heart."

He has three daughters and many grandchildren. One of the latter, recently graduated, chose finance, like his grandfather. One part of *the house is kept for the children's ramblings.* He had a son, whom he lost. He mentions it calmly.

He was born in Port Said in 1917, and still speaks with the trace of a rural dialect. He graduated *from the Egyptian University's Faculty of* Commerce in 1938, and worked in the Ministry of Supply. He was appointed commercial attaché to the Egyptian embassy in Washington in 1952, where he pursued his higher studies. *In 1954*, he was recalled to Egypt to reinstate the Alexandria Cotton Bourse, closed in the wake of the Revolution. He was the first post-Revolution minister of finance, appointed in 1958, after his role in the negotiations over the Suez Canal assets. He was member of parliament for thirteen years, from 1957 to 1970, representing Sayyida Zeinab, and served on the parliamentary budget and planning committee.

He became director of Banque Misr in 1961, while heading the Ministry of Finance, Supply and the Economy from 1958 to 1962.

He was minister of economy and foreign trade between 1965 and 1972, a period of tentative rapprochement with the West aborted by the 1967 War.

He forged strong links with the Gulf states after 1967, and was appointed five years later by President Sadat as advisor to Sheikh Zayed, then rul*er of Abu Dhabi, a position he held for 14 years.* In the early seventies, having participated in the negotiations for independence from Britain, Zaki helped set up the ministries and legal and fi*nancial institutions which would* unify the Emirates into one state. He helped establish the Abu Dhabi Fund for Arab Economic Development, which started with a capital of $17 billion for *soft-term loans to the Arab countries.* The fund soon expanded to include other developing countries the world over.

A man for whom holism is important, he found the experience gratifying. "The Emirates were newly independent. They wanted to choose their own strategy, style of life, philosophy and pedagogy." The years he spent in the Gulf, then, made him something of an authority on nation-building.

He has founded and headed a number of Arab financial institutions and banks. He was vice-president of the Arab International Bank in the 1970s, and has been the chairman of the Societe Arab Internationale Du Banque since 1973. Dur*ing the Arab boycott of Egypt after the Camp* David accords, relations continued, albeit on an informal basis, with these institutions.

Today, Zaki's activities remain as diverse as his concerns. Last month, he formed Egypt's first financial leasing company, an institution that he had long advocated, aimed at helping corporations to obtain ships, airplanes and machinery.

One of the country's foremost authorities on the stock market, he believes much can be done to improve the stock exchange: rapid privatisation of companies to expand the market and protect it from the hectic ups and downs of daily dealings; new technologies; more transparency. "We need a public who understand what the stock market is, the difference between shares and bonds. We need specialised journalists who can make daily forecasts, not agitate with headlines like 'stock market collapse' when a share declines by three per cent."

For someone whose job had been for years to keep an eye on fluctuation, he looks upon his life with the *equilibrium of a man* who knows he has followed a definite path. Beneath the silk covering of the Ka'ba, on a table, is a futuristic electronic device, reminiscent of an illustration from *Jules* Vernes. It is an alternative-medecine machine, with the power to heal through vibrations: a fitting emblem of his desire to transcend material things.

Profile by **Aziza Sami**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♠ I know that many of you are *still gnashing your teeth* in despair at the thought that, although Christmas is almost upon us, you are still utterly incapable of coming up with a sufficiently splendid gift for your one and only Sos. I sympathise, dears, I do. In fact, I sympathise so strongly (only a week to go, after all), that I'll give you a teensy hint. Don't feel obliged to follow up, of course. If, when the Christmas bells start *ringing* in earnest, you are still stumped, just send me a card. I am drawing up a special list of people just like you, for next year. You have been warned. *But as I was saying, if you are* open to suggestion, you could pop over and visit my good friend the lovely **Suzanne El-Masry**, who is currently holding an exhibition of her utterly unique and totally dazzling pieces of jewellery. Silver, enamel, strange shapes reminiscent of birds and flowers... well, I'm getting quite flustered. And just for you, my sweet last-minute shoppers, this exhibition will continue until Christmas Eve. So, dears, you really have *no* excuse.









L-r: Nermin and Hani; Nahla and Ahmed; Ethical Industrialists by Mohamed Abdel-Ghani

♥ Well, darlings, some people are not waiting for little Christmas packets tied cunningly with *red ribbon; they are doing drastic things which* call for far larger packets, like getting married, for instance. Our own **Hani Mustafa** chose the festive season to announce that, come new year, he will be a married man. He and the lovely **Nermin Nizar** were married last week and celebrated the happy event by throwing a delightful garden party at noon, in the gardens of the Mövenpick Jolie Ville — appropriately named Jolly Land. The happy couple proceeded slowly from their chalet, reaching Jolly Land to the accompaniment *of soft violin music, in a sophisticated zaffa* attended by all their friends and *relations. Our editor-in-chief,* **Hosny Guindy**, was seen chatting with our layout editor **Samir Sobhi** and our colleague **Galal Nassar** while young couples joined **Hani** and **Nermin** on the dance floor, where they skillfully demonstrated that the tango is not the exclusive province of their grandparents. The young couple have left for a romantic honeymoon, destination unknown.

♣ I must say that the more I attend weddings, the more I like them. Can one become a professional wedding-goer, *I wonder?* Anyway, another wedding I attended featured many of the traditions I so adore, and for which I now have a plethora of appropriately-themed garments. **Ahmed**, the son of **Maj. Gen Mohamed Abdel-Fattah Bahgat** and **Nahla**, the daughter of **Zahran Mohamedein Zahran** tied the knot last week and the reception that followed at the Cleopatra Ballroom of the Semiramis Intercontinental was out of a Thousand and One Nights. The *guest list* was one of the most impressive I have seen in a long time, including bussinessmen, writers, journalists and intellectuals. Among the distinguished guests, I managed to spot **Saleh Selim** and made a bee line in his direction. I have always *had a particularly soft spot for* **Saleh**, the legendary soccer player.... but even though during the festive season a little swooning is not totally out of place, I tried to impress him with my intellectual powers as well, discussing at length some of my favourite topics, soccer and the Ahli. **Saleh**, however, remained immune to my charms, and preferred to comment only on the elegance of the wedding and the obvious bliss of the newlyweds.

♦ Unfortunately, weddings are not on my agenda every day and, as I was consulting the little book where *I keep* my friends' vital statistics (just details, dears — age, weight, that sort of thing) to find out whose children were due to be engaged or married soon, I remembered an interesting tome I had just received: ***Melouk Iqtissad Al-Qeyam*** ("Ethical Industrialists") by **Mohamed Abdel-Ghani Allam**, one of our dear colleagues at *Al-Ahram Al-Masai'*. I leafed through it and suddenly stopped hoping for weddings. I was so fascinated that I could not put the little volume down. *Names like* ***Talaat Harb****, the pioneer of* the Egyptian economy, **Ahmed Abboud Pasha**, the pioneer of maritime transport, and **Abu Regeila**, who practically created public transportation as we know it now, figured prominently.



